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LITTLE BOY HEROES OF FRANCE



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Frontispiece

HE LIFTED THE RIFLE CLEAR

LITTLE BOY HEROES OF FRANCE

A Book of the Deeds of Valor of the Sturdy
Little Patriots of France During the
Great War

By
RUTH ROYCE

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE stories of deeds of valor of Little Boy Heroes of France, as recorded in this volume, have been selected with extreme care, and the author regards as authentic the sources from which the incidents have been obtained. Names of persons and places have, in most instances, been changed, but the stories, as they came to the author, have been faithfully set down here, and are thus offered to the liberty-loving lads of America.

RUTH ROYCE.

INTRODUCTION

THE Little Boy Heroes of France!

There are none greater, none who reflect the glory of France more splendidly, than do these little men, most of them reared amidst humble surroundings, but whose hearts are true and whose deeds are noble. Each and every one of them carries in his heart the spirit that has made France great—that has enabled her to fight on to victory in the cause of human liberty—and hundreds, perhaps thousands, of them have given up their lives rather than betray their beloved France to the cruel Germans.

This wonderful spirit in the children of France is well exemplified in an incident that is said to have occurred at the battle of Verdun, when a French lad, who had been carrying water to the wounded on the battle-field, was struck by an exploding shell and his right leg torn away. He was removed

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to a field emergency station, where the surgeon who was attending him expressed his deep sympathy for the little sufferer.

"I am so sorry, my little man," he said, "that you have lost your leg."

"Lost it? I have not lost it, my Doctor, I have given it to France," was the reply of this sturdy little hero, and in these words did he reveal the spirit and the love and pride of country that have made the children of France beloved of all the civilized world.

The deeds of heroism of these devoted French boys, many mere children, as set down in this volume, are but a few among many. There are other, many other, stories of individual heroism that, alas, never will be told, for the child actors in these human tragedies of the great world war are resting under the soil of beautiful France.

Standing, as many of them have stood, looking death in the face, and smiling into that face without so much as the quiver of a muscle or the rapid pulsation of the heart,

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these little soldiers of France have met their doom, proud and happy that they were privileged to die for the country that they loved so well. Their bravery and spirit of self-sacrifice are the one beautiful spot in the savage warfare of the German military power. It is a shining lesson to us and teaches us that, unless we, with a smile on our lips, are willing to give our lives for our country, we do not love it as these little men loved the country for which they offered and, in many instances, gave up their lives.

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CHAPTER I

“JACK THE GIANT KILLER”

HE was big and thin and bony, but as supple and quick as a cat, was Sergeant Bomber Haynes, U. S. A., fresh from the trenches of France. His voice, when he let it out, was not unlike the distant boom of a cannon, but it was the fierce expression that he could bring to his face that made all shiver with apprehension who beheld him.

This was especially true of the college students at Lennox, whom Bomber Haynes had been sent over to teach the gentle art of hurling deadly bombs, and it was when he

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was instructing that he always wore what the students called "his battle face," a face calculated to strike terror to enemy and friend alike. It already had struck terror to many Germans when he charged down on them, hurling bombs loaded with high explosive.

While the college men stood in real awe of the soldier-bomber, the children of the little college town actually adored the big, lean bomb-thrower, and, with all his apparent fierceness, the sergeant loved every one of them. Children were the joy of his life, and, with the quick instinct of childhood, they read his heart aright. Therefore Bomber Haynes' appearance was at all times the signal for joyous outbursts on the part of the children, and shouts of "Here comes Jack the Giant Killer!"

Bomber Haynes was living on a ranch in a far western town when the war started in 1914. He at once enlisted in a Canadian regiment, in which he served until the United States entered the war, whereupon

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he was transferred to a New York regiment, in which he had served gloriously ever since. Besides his teaching at the college he had organized the boys of the town into bombing squads, and, with potatoes as weapons, had taught them how to throw bombs and hit the mark. At the rear of the village schoolhouse trenches had been dug under his direction, and many a fierce battle had been waged there between the rival armies, into which the boys of Lennox entered with the true American spirit.

“You fellows are just like the little Frenchmen,” declared Bomber Haynes one afternoon after he had conducted a hot bombing expedition with his young friends.

“Tell us about them,” cried little Abe Skinner, who, despite his diminutive size, was the leader of one of the armies of potato bombers.

Bomber Haynes reflected a moment.

“I will do that. Yes, I will tell you. Sit down, all of you, and be at rest while I ‘carry on,’ and you shall hear a story of a brave

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little man, and later on I will tell you of other brave little Frenchmen. I wish to explain that some of these stories have come to me from the lips of persons who knew them to be true; other stories I know at first hand. Let me see, where shall I begin? I know how to fight the Germans better than I know how to tell stories. Ah! I have it. Now at rest," he commanded, fixing his gaze on his youthful friends and clearing his throat. "Listen to the tale of the deeds of heroism of a little soldier of France."

"All right, let's go," urged Abe Skinner, in the words of the American soldiers in the front line trench when the moment has arrived for them to go over the top and charge the German trenches.

CHAPTER II

CHARLOT OF THE MARNE

“CHARLOT (pronounced Charlo) was believed to be not more than thirteen years of age. He was small and slight and one of the best known of the newsboys of Paris. He was known on the boulevards as the Bus Boy because he devoted his business hours to selling papers to passengers on the Paris omnibuses, and there his shrill voice might be heard calling out his wares, ‘*le Matin, le Journal,*’ and when his keen eyes discovered an American on top of a bus his cry would change to ‘’Ere’s yer New York papers, all about America coming over to fight the Boches!’ He was a live little merchant, was Charlot.

“I must explain to you about those omnibuses. They are somewhat like the stages

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one sees on Fifth Avenue in New York, built with two decks, so that passengers may sit on top and view the scenery. Newsboys in Paris are not allowed to go on these omnibuses to sell their papers, but Charlot solved the problem that, I understand, had bothered all the newsboys of the beautiful French city. He got a long pole. At the top he fastened a light board with niches in it into which he stuck his papers so that the headlines might be easily read. On the top of the board was a little tin cup. Charlot would run along beside the bus and thrust his pole up above the top of it, while the vehicle was in motion, and call out his papers. Passengers would pick out the paper they wished and drop a coin in the tin cup, whereupon Charlot would run to another bus and repeat the performance.

“One day the American troops came to Paris. They were different from the tourists that Charlot was familiar with, being big, lean, square-jawed fellows with smiling, good-natured faces, always with a cheerful

CHARLOT OF THE MARNE

word on their lips for the little newsboy. And how they did buy papers! Though in most instances they paid him twice what he asked for his papers, he would have been willing to sell his wares to them for half the price that others paid. Now and then American soldiers would throw coins to him as they gazed down into his impish upturned face.

“‘Not from my beloved Americans,’ Charlot would cry, shaking his head with emphasis and tossing the gifts back to the upper deck of the bus. He refused their gifts invariably, whereas in the old days he would take all he could get from the tourists and beg for more.

“Troops came and went, but it was always the same. They were the same lovable, manly fellows, and Charlot grew to love them as he did the poilus of his beloved France. Every day he read his newspapers eagerly, searching for accounts of the doings of his friends the Americans. Then one day Charlot disappeared from the boule-

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wards of Paris. It was more than a week later when, in the billets back of the lines at the Marne, a diminutive figure, bent under the weight of a huge bundle of newspapers on his back, staggered in among the troops and a shrill, familiar voice cried out, ' 'Ere's yer New York papers! All the Americans coming over to fight the Boches!'

"It was Charlot. Many of the soldiers recognized his little impish face, but it was the papers that interested them most.

" 'How much?' they demanded.

" 'Ten sous to my beloved Americans.'

" 'Robber!' accused a doughboy laughingly.

" 'You shall see that Charlot is no robber, my beloved American. You shall see,' returned the little Frenchman.

"His papers were all bought up in a few minutes, leaving him in possession of a nice little sum of money. How the boy got there none knew, but from his appearance when he first reached the rest billets it was plain that he had walked a long distance. Nor

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did any one know how he had managed to obtain a pass to enter the American lines. Charlot had not been a newsboy in Paris without learning how to get what he wanted, and to get it quickly. Some of the younger American officers looked upon him with suspicion. His ready tongue and keen face led them to wonder if he were not another German spy. The soldiers, however, knew better, and not a man of them who would not stand up for the French boy.

“Again Charlot disappeared, this time from the American camp, but he was not gone long, and upon his return he had more papers, papers that plainly had been handled and read by others. These he sold and pocketed more money. After selling out he gathered up all the papers he could find and sold them over again, after which he disappeared once more. One day he sauntered into camp just as a large body of troops was being moved forward. Some big movement was on foot, as his keen eyes readily discovered, though he made no comment, but he

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nodded with satisfaction. During the day the boy made himself useful about the camp and, when darkness fell and the soldiers began moving forward through communicating trenches on their way to the front lines, many of them never to come back, he hurried to the rear. He returned later in the evening with a heavy pack on his back. It was not newspapers that Charlot carried, though it was only himself, and possibly the commanding officer of a certain unit, who knew what was in that pack.

“Finally, when he discovered an opportunity, the little newsboy sought to enter a communicating trench with the intention of making his way to the front. He was stopped by a sentry and sternly turned back.

“‘I am permitted to go, my American,’ insisted Charlot.

“‘Who permitted you?’ demanded the sentry. ‘Show me your permit.’

“‘I do not know his name. The officer told me it would be all right and—’

CHARLOT OF THE MARNE

“‘Go away with you. Out there is no place for children.’ Then in a more kindly tone the sentry, leaning over, whispered: ‘Kid, there is going to be a big scrap out there in No Man’s Land to-night. You go back where you will be safe. Only men are wanted out there this night.’

“‘Charlot is a man, too. He will show you that he is a man even if he is little,’ answered the lad resolutely, brushing a hand across his face, for the tears had sprung to his eyes. He turned away without another word and sat down to think, now and then narrowly observing the sentry. Suddenly Charlot realized that the sentry had for some reason stepped into the communicating trench. The little fellow was up in a twinkling and, shouldering his pack, stole away into the darkness in the direction of the front lines. He dared not try to enter the communicating trench, but walked boldly on top, across the fields, now and then stumbling and falling into deep shell holes, but steadily plodding on toward the place

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where men were waiting breathlessly for the word of their commanding officers to go over the top.

“No one was up there to interfere with him, though an occasional shell burst near him. Every time he heard one of these coming the little newsboy would throw himself flat on the ground just as he had seen the soldiers do in like circumstances. There he would lie while the air was filled with dirt and stones thrown up by the explosion of the shell, shaking a brown little fist angrily toward the German lines. At last he found himself just in the rear of the American first-line trench, having successfully made his way over the rear trenches without being discovered by the soldiers from across the sea.

“At last the word to go over the top was given by the officers in the front-line trench. Still Charlot lay motionless in a shell-hole. He could hear the men leaving the trench ahead of him, and, a few minutes later, those from the rear trenches were running past him on their way to the front.

CHARLOT OF THE MARNE

“All at once it seemed to little Charlot as if the world were blowing up. Star-shells burst high in the air, big guns on both sides opened up, machine-guns began their rat-tat-tat, and sharp bursts of flame high in the air showed where shells were exploding near some venturesome airship. The little Frenchman gazed in awe, though with no fear in his heart.

“‘It is time for Charlot to go,’ he decided suddenly. ‘They shall not send him back, nor will they, for he will show his beloved Americans that he too is a man!’

“Shouldering his pack, Charlot slid down into the front-line trench and, clambering out on the other side, made his way slowly over the uneven ground in No Man’s Land, which was now swept by a perfect storm of bullets. He gave these no heed, but his little heart beat faster as he saw a figure lying on the ground ahead of him. The boy crept up and called softly to the motionless figure, but there was no response, and there was a sob in little Charlot’s throat as he

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staggered to his feet and pressed on toward the front. The lad pricked up his ears when he heard some one moaning just ahead of him, and hurried on in search of the owner of the voice. What he found was a wounded American soldier.

“Charlot gave him a drink of water, then from his pack selected a bar of chocolate and a package of gum, which he thrust into the hands of the wounded man.

“‘Thanks, little pard,’ breathed the soldier gratefully. ‘These things will take my mind from my troubles while I am waiting for the stretcher-bearers. I am wounded in both legs and have a piece of shrapnel in my shoulder. Otherwise I’m all right.’

“Charlot ran back, and soon returned with two stretcher-bearers. Then he struggled on, pausing now and then to give water to a wounded soldier, always pressing into the soldier’s hand a bar of chocolate and a package of gum. It was with these things that his heavy pack was loaded, bought with the profits he had made by selling papers to

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the soldiers, and he was giving his profits, as well as his slender capital, back to the brave men from across the sea who had come to defend his beloved France.

“All night long did little Charlot work among the wounded soldiers, giving water where it was begged for, and distributing gum and chocolate with loving hands. Many an American soldier blessed the little Frenchman that night. Long before morning Charlot’s supply of gum and chocolate was exhausted, but there was plenty of work for him to do. The boy gathered up all the canteens he could find, and, running back, filled them with water and returned to the battlefield. This he did many times, continuing his work of mercy on into the day of terrible fighting, without rest and through the killing heat, giving water, searching out stretcher-bearers whom he led to grievously wounded men, doing little deeds of mercy and heroism. For three days and two nights did the little newsboy of the Paris boulevards continue his noble work.

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“It was on the evening of the third day, while he was giving water to a wounded soldier, that little Charlot’s work of mercy came to an end. A shell exploded close at hand while he was holding a canteen to the lips of a dying American. The brave little Frenchman fell forward on his face and rolled over on his back beside the man he had been aiding, and there a fighting chaplain found them half an hour later. The soldier was dead; Charlot lay as he had fallen, but without uttering a single moan. His bright little eyes looked up into those of the chaplain.

“‘Padré, Charlot is going away,’ he said weakly.

“‘Yes, my son. Many brave fellows have gone before you this day.’

“‘My brave poilus, my brave Americans,’ murmured the lad. ‘Padré, tell my brave Americans that Charlot did the best he could, that all the money he made from the papers he gave back to them in chocolate and gum.’

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“‘Yes, my noble lad. You have proved yourself as much a hero as if you had been fighting the Germans out there by the wood, and whose bullets we now hear about us.’

“‘Padré, Charlot’s eyes see but faintly. Take me in your arms, Padré, just as my mother used to do. Ah, that is well. Padré, tell them that little Charlot did not fear to die and that, though they would not let him be a soldier, he died like a soldier. I—’

“The little fellow’s voice trailed off into a whisper and his slender form grew limp. All at once a tremor ran through his little frame, his eyes opened widely.

“‘Vive la France! Vive l’America,’ he cried.

“And thus, my dear little friends, died a boy hero of France.”

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE LORRAINIAN SPY

ABE SKINNER, when the sergeant joined them on the following afternoon, declared that, if the Germans were shooting at him, he wouldn't have any appetite for chocolate and gum, and that those doughboys over in France must have queer appetites.

Bomber Haynes explained that a chew of gum helped to keep the minds of the men from their pain and really was a great help in steadying them when wounded, as well as when they were in action.

"Tell us some more stories about other fellows who were like the brave little Charlot," urged Abe. "He was brave, all right, though if I were going out to fight the Boches I should want to carry a gun, or a pocket full of bombs, instead of a bag of gum and choco-

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late on my back. What a weapon to fight with! Woof!"

Bomber Haynes grinned appreciatively and admitted that he felt very much as his young friend did on that subject.

"This time," he began, "I will tell you of a brave little boy of France who was a spy because he had to be. The Germans made him a spy, but he outwitted them and— But wait until we get to the story of how his spying ended. It would not do for me to tell you the ending and then the beginning. Ahem! His name was Louis and he was a mere child in years.

"With his grandmother, Louis lived in the village of Touraille in Lorraine, when the Germans swept down and captured the town from the French. That was before the American troops got there. The Germans, after taking the village, shot the young men and sent the older men back to work in the fields, leaving only the women and children to do the work of the village, which was principally to feed the hated Germans.

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“Louis loved his grandmother very much, as naturally she did him, and he was sad when one day a German captain ordered him to go on a mission to the French lines, then but a few miles to the westward of Touraille.

“‘You will,’ said the German captain sternly, ‘gather some food—some vegetables from the fields—and take them with you to give to the officers in the French lines, and you will stay there until you have learned the exact location of their guns, their artillery, then you will return to us. Do you understand?’

“‘Louis understands only too well, Herr Captain. He understands that you would make him a spy against his own beloved France. Louis would die before he would do so dastardly a thing.’

“The German captain laughed harshly.

“‘Listen,’ he commanded. ‘Unless you do as you are ordered by me your beloved grandmother shall be stood up before a firing squad and be shot, and you shall witness

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the glorious deed. What say you now, my brave little Frenchman?" sneered the Hun captain.

" 'I will do your bidding, and may the good Father in heaven forgive,' murmured the unhappy boy. 'Tell me what it is that you wish.'

" 'I have already told you. The French artillery is causing us a great deal of trouble and we have not been able to locate their guns. We are a small force here and we have no airplanes to give us assistance. You will be the eyes of our little army here. Ah, it is fine that it should be a Frenchman who spies on his own! You will give your French no hint of the size of our force nor of anything about us, unless you wish to tell them we are larger than we really are. You, being French, will know how to lie to them so that no harm may come to us. The French ever show glib tongues.'

" 'Yes, but not lying tongues like the Boche,' retorted Louis.

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“‘Silence!’ roared the German officer. ‘Listen further. If you divulge the slightest word that will give the French information of our position I shall know it, and when you return—your grandmother will pay the price of your dishonor. You will return here to-night before dark. Remember the penalty if you fail.’

“Without delay the lad started off across the fields in the direction of the French lines. He carried with him a nice fat chicken that he had captured, and with this he soon had an armful of vegetables that he well knew his countrymen would be glad to get. Early in the forenoon Louis came upon a French sentry and was halted.

“‘Halt! What are you doing here?’

“‘I come to bring you food. We are prisoners over there in the Boche lines at Touraille, I and my grandmother, but they are stupid fellows. It is easy to fool them. I can go and come as I choose. Here is a chicken for you. I shall come every day or so and bring you things.’

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“‘You are a real Frenchman,’ answered the sentry glowingly. ‘You may go where you will, for there are other French children and women within our lines.’

“Meeting a lieutenant, who eyed him sharply, Louis offered the officer some of the vegetables, which the lieutenant accepted, and then questioned Louis as had the sentry, only he was more definite in his questioning as to the location of the German artillery than the sentry had been. These questions Louis skillfully dodged, for he knew that if he gave the desired information the French would immediately begin shelling the Germans, and then the German captain would know that Louis had played him false, which meant death to the boy’s grandmother.

“Louis wandered all about in the French lines, locating pretty much all of the French artillery, making note in his mind of distances and locations so that he might not forget them. Late in the afternoon he started back.

“Reaching the village of Touraille in

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safety the lad proceeded directly to the office of the German captain.

“‘Well?’ demanded the German officer sharply. ‘What have you learned?’

“‘Too much for a Boche to know,’ replied the lad boldly.

“‘Tell me what you have learned or the penalty shall be on your own head.’

“‘I shall tell.’ Long since Louis had made his plans and they were plans that he did not believe could fail. ‘The heaviest battery of their guns is situated in a grove about a hundred meters from the old stone mill. That is the one that I think is giving you the most trouble, Herr Captain. The lighter guns are here on this map I made for you after I left the French camp. Now am I and my grandmother to rest in peace?’

“‘Until the day after to-morrow. You shall then go again, for by then they will have moved their artillery after finding that we have their range so closely. You have done well.’

“After having questioned the boy closely,

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the German captain dismissed him and Louis hurried home to his grandmother, but he did not tell her what he had been doing or where he had been. He decided that it were better to keep his business to himself.

“That night the German artillery opened up, using the ranges that Louis had given them, but of course they did not know whether or not they had put any of the French artillery out of commission. The French replied about as they had been doing, but no better, proving to the German captain that Louis had not given the French any information about the positions of the German guns.

“On the second day Louis was again started on his way, and this time he had two chickens, one for the sentry and one for the lieutenant, whose name and company he had taken the precaution of getting on his first visit.

“‘How are the Boches shooting?’ questioned the lad of the sentry after handing over a chicken to him.

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“ ‘Badly. Their shells are falling all of a hundred meters from our batteries of seventy-sevens, and they held the same range all night. It was the same with their shooting at our lighter batteries.’

“ ‘The Boches ever were poor shooters,’ observed Louis carelessly, starting to go on to the camp.

“As on the former occasion, the French boy delivered one of the chickens to the sentry and the other to the lieutenant, and vegetables to a few of the privates, for his stock was too small to go far. While in camp he again took careful note of the positions of the French guns and chuckled as he noted how badly the Germans had been shooting through the night. Louis went away with fresh figures in his head and reported to the Herr Captain on the new position of the French guns.

“On his third visit to the French lines something new developed. A commanding officer was commenting on the shooting of the German guns. The fact that every time

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the French changed the positions of their batteries the Germans corrected their range, indicated that the Huns were getting information from the French side.

“ ‘There is a young French boy who comes to our lines frequently with vegetables and other things,’ observed an intelligence officer. ‘I just heard to-day that he comes from Touraille.’

“ ‘A spy!’ fairly exploded the commanding officer, a captain. ‘When he comes again place him under arrest! Find out who permitted him to enter our lines. I should have been informed of this.’

“ ‘I think the boy is all right,’ spoke up the young lieutenant to whom Louis had given the chicken, he having come in during the latter part of the captain’s conversation with his intelligence officer. ‘He is in the camp now. I think I can find him.’

“ ‘Fetch him here at once!’ commanded the captain.

“Louis soon entered the commander’s headquarters, led by the lieutenant to whom

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he had given the chicken, and looking not a bit frightened over the fact that he was under arrest.

“‘I found him asking questions about our batteries,’ announced the lieutenant, frowning.

“‘Ah! A spy!’ cried the captain, fixing a stern gaze on the face of the little Frenchman.

“‘Louis nodded.

“‘Spying on the French for the Germans, eh?’

“‘It is true,’ answered Louis sadly.

“‘You admit it. Unhappy boy—for this you shall be shot. To think that a Frenchman could fall so low. Bah!’

“‘But, my officer,’ begged the lad, now thoroughly aroused, ‘the Boches have not hit anything. Their range has ever been far to one side or the other of the mark.’

“‘That is also true,’ replied the captain, searching the face of the little spy before him and beginning to wonder. ‘Tell me what you have in mind, but be brief.’

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“Louis thereupon explained how the German officer had ordered him to go to the French lines and keep the Boches informed as to the positions of the French guns. If the boy failed it would be at the forfeit of the life of his grandmother, who lived in yonder village.

“‘My Captain, I gave the Boches the range each time, but it was not the true range. You will remember that yesterday it was a hundred meters to the north of the heavies; to-day it is the same distance to the south. Not one Boche shell has reached its mark. I am a Frenchman,’ added the little man, rising to his full height and looking the commanding officer squarely in the eyes. ‘Sooner would I die than betray my beloved France, even to save the life of my beloved grandmother. That is all I can say, sir.’

“The captain sprang up and, embracing the little Frenchman, kissed him on both cheeks.

“‘My brave boy! You are indeed a true Frenchman. So it is you who are respon-

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sible for the clumsy shooting of the Huns in these few days? It is worthy of the strategy of a great general. Yet, what shall you do now?"

" 'I must return else they will shoot my grandmother. But before I go I will give you the positions of all the German batteries, that you may shell them out. Fear not for us, but kill the Boches—leave not a man of them. Ah, how I loathe, how I hate the cowardly mob, every man of it! Wait, and I will prove that what I say is true. Do you see yonder group of trees? I will give the Huns that group of trees as the position of your heavy artillery to-day. Two hours after I have left your lines you shall see the German shells falling there. It is then, my Captain, that you will open up on them, firing at the enemy positions that I have given to you.'

" 'Yes, but what will happen to you, my boy?'

" 'Louis and his grandmother will not be in the village then. May I go, my Captain?'

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“‘Yes, yes, and may the Father watch over you, my brave little Frenchman,’ replied the captain feelingly.

“Almost exactly two hours later the German shells began falling among the trees indicated by the little spy, and it was then that the French guns opened up, and the fire of the latter soon wiped out the main batteries of the enemy. But what of little Louis and his much-loved grandmother? None knew what became of them until several days later, after the French had taken the village of Touraille. Then the captain learned that shortly after it became apparent that the French had the exact range of the German guns, the brave little Louis and his grandmother were taken out and stood up before a firing squad.

“That is the spirit, boys, that we boys of America should have, nor are we true Americans unless we are prepared to give all that we have, to die with a smile on our lips for the great country that we all love so well.”

CHAPTER IV

SEVEN SOLDIERS AND A LOAD OF HAY

“THOSE French youngsters are quick-witted, too, boys,” resumed Bomber Haynes at his next recital a few days later, for, up to that time, he had been too busy with his work at the college to continue his stories of the Boy Heroes of France.

“On my way down here to-day I was thinking of an incident that occurred not far from the River Somme when the allied armies were making their big drive shortly after they got the Huns on the run. Julien was the name of the little French boy concerned in it. He was about your age and build, Abe, and wore wooden shoes and had spent most of his few years working hard on his father’s farm. His features were heavy, but his eyes were bright with intelligence,

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for little Julien had read, and in the winter he went to school with the firm purpose of learning all he could.

“Julien lived with his parents in the little French village of Beauville, hard by the River Somme, about which some of the most desperate battles of the war have been waged. Their farmhouse was situated on the outskirts of the village, the latter, at the time of which I speak, being in the hands of the Germans, because they had just driven a small French detachment out of the place.

“In taking Beauville, the Germans succeeded in cutting off several small groups of French soldiers. Many of these were shot in attempting to escape, others were made prisoners, but one group succeeded in evading the Huns and hiding in the village. There was not one of those loyal French peasants who would not have put his own life in jeopardy to save the beloved poilus had he been given the opportunity; but so successfully had the Frenchmen hidden themselves that only one person in the vil-

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lage knew where they were. That person was the wooden-faced Julien. He had seen them slink into his father's barn, where much hay had been stored.

"Julien kept away from the barn, fearing that to be seen near it might arouse the suspicion of the Germans. But he kept an eye on it from a distance, and, when finally the Huns reached the building and began to search it for the missing Frenchmen, he had all he could do to keep himself from crying out, 'They are not there!'

"Finally the Germans went away to search other places, whereupon Julien went away too, not even going to feed the horses that were neighing for their midday meal. He dared not go near the place just yet.

"As the day drew to a close he went whistling to the building and led his father's horses out to the trough for water, all the time observed narrowly by a German sentry near by. After returning the animals to the stable, he climbed up to the haymow and began throwing down hay for the horses.

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“‘My beloved poilus,’ he called softly. There was no reply. ‘I know you are here. I am Julien, whose father owns the barn. You can speak, for there are no Boches near. One is out yonder about three hundred meters away, wondering why I am so long in the barn.’

“‘What do you want?’ demanded a muffled voice from the depths of the haymow.

“‘To save you when the right time comes,’ answered the boy promptly.

“‘How? The Huns will get us if we so much as show our faces.’

“‘Of course they will. The answer is simple—do not show your faces. Listen! After darkness has fallen Julien will come back, if the way is clear, and bring you food.’

“It was late that evening when he returned to the barn with food for the hiding soldiers, slinking past the sentry when the latter’s back was turned toward him. Julien carried the food to the haymow and called softly. There was a slight movement in the hay.

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“‘Eat, but leave no crumbs. I have brought bread and cheese and a bottle of water. It is the best I could do. To-morrow you may get nothing, though I shall try to give you something. If I come into the barn do not speak unless I first call to you.’

“With that Julien slipped out at the rear of the barn and cautiously made his way to the cottage where he lived. His father, with other able-bodied men of the village, had been taken by the Germans and compelled to work at building up defenses and digging trenches, but so long as his father obeyed orders, Julien did not believe any harm could come to him.

“All night the guns boomed and the sound of them lulled the little patriot to sleep. On the following morning Julien was up early and on his way to the barn to feed his horses. There was a new sentry on duty in the vicinity of the barn. He entered while the boy was doing his chores, but Julien paid no attention to the presence of the German, and went about his work whistling. After

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finishing, he returned to his home for breakfast.

“Now his plan was ready to be carried out. After breakfast he hitched up the horses and drove a wagon into the barn, where he began loading it from the hay-mow.

“‘Julien is going away now, but he will return,’ he announced in a low tone after he had loaded on all the hay the wagon would hold. ‘Do not come out, but dig deeper into the hay and stay there.’

“Having given this advice he drove from the barn and started away, whistling.

“‘Halt! Where are you going?’ demanded the sentry, pointing his rifle toward the boy on the load of hay.

“‘I am taking the hay where the French shells will not burn it up. If the hay burns there will be none for the horses this winter and they will die of hunger,’ was the ready response.

“‘Where, I say?’ persisted the sentry.

“‘Over by yonder wood, where I shall pile

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it up. You can watch me from a distance to see that I do not go further.'

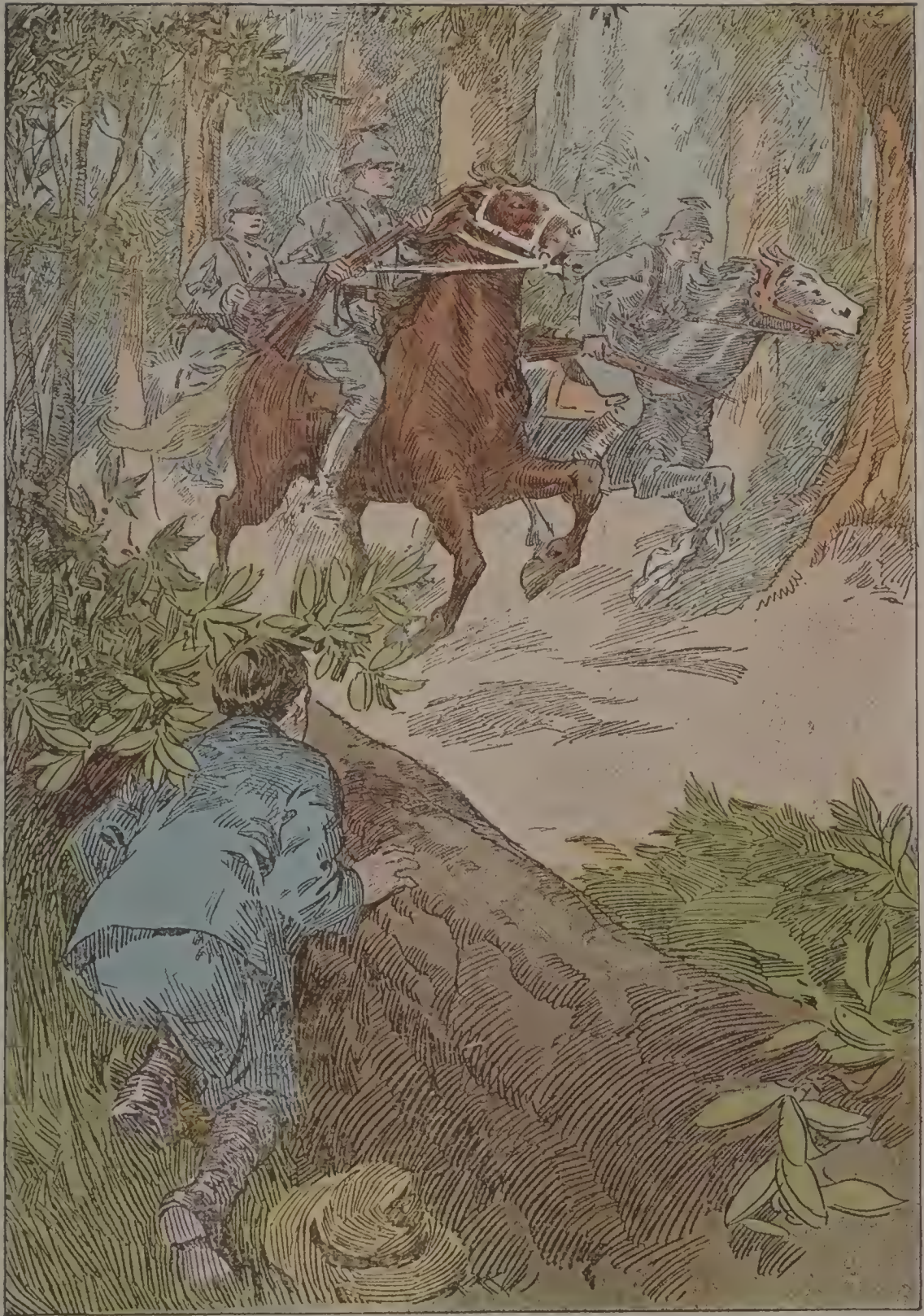
" 'Ah! I see. You are taking the hay to the Frenchmen.'

" 'No; Frenchmen do not eat hay like the animals. I shall do as I said, which you can readily see.'

" 'Pass,' ordered the sentry. 'If you try any tricks you will find a bullet following you.'

"Further on Julien was again held up, this time by three German cavalrymen who were stationed in the road to stop and turn back all persons from the village. The lad explained to them, as he had to the sentry, where he was going and for what reason.

" 'How do we know but that you have some Frenchmen hidden in the hay?' demanded one. With that they dismounted and tipped over the wagon and its load, spilling Julien out and burying him under the hay. He scrambled out, tears of anger in his eyes, while the German cavalrymen shouted with laughter.



THE CAVALRYMEN DASHED PAST HIM

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“ ‘None but a Boche would do a thing like that,’ he flung at them. ‘Cowards, all of you!’

“The troopers laughed and jeered while the plucky boy laboriously piled his hay back on the wagon and quickly drove away, fearing they would again turn his load over. Reaching a point by the woods he pitched the hay off, piling it up and making a base for the stack that he proposed to build.

“When Julien brought the second load, it was tipped over, like the first, by the cavalrymen, and so was the third, but by the time Julien arrived with the fourth load they had tired of their sport and turned their backs on him as he passed.

“About the middle of the afternoon the troopers rode away, and a new sentry was on post near the barn when the boy got back. He offered to divide his bread and cheese with the sentry, which the latter eagerly accepted. The next load went through without opposition, but still Julien kept steadily at his work, now and then passing a word to

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the French soldiers in the hay, who had dug themselves in deeper as he lowered the hay in the mow. The afternoon grew late, and the sentry had ceased to be interested in the boy's work. The time to try out his great plan had arrived, and Julien knew it, so, driving into the barn, he pitched rapidly for a few moments then called softly.

“‘Come out, one at a time, and jump into the wagon. Each man cover himself up with hay instantly when he gets aboard. Hurry while I watch through a crack in the barn.’

“Seven very much mussed poilus dug their way out one by one and hurriedly deposited themselves in the wagon, whereupon Julien grew active once more and began pitching hay on them from the mow. The men were near the top of the load so that but little hay was above them, and they were now able to breathe with less difficulty than when they were under the hay in the barn.

“‘All ready now. Keep quiet and don't be frightened,’ he admonished, clucking to

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his horses and driving out of the barn. As he passed the sentry, whistling gaily, Julien waved a hand, to which the sentry responded in like manner, and the journey to the haystack in the field began, without haste and in the same manner that Julien had been 'carrying on' all day. When well out of ear-shot of enemy troops, the boy gave the soldiers their final orders.

" 'One at a time will drop off under cover of a forkful of hay as I raise it from the load,' he directed. 'You will each roll on the ground from the side of the stack nearest to the woods, and then creep into the forest, making certain that you keep the stack between you and the village while you are doing it. Do you know how to get to the French lines?'

" 'They said that they did.

" 'Then there is nothing more to be said,' continued Julien. 'Follow a path you will find as you enter the forest, and go straight ahead about a hundred meters until you come to a tree on the right side of the path

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where the bark has been chipped off. There you will find a dozen rifles that once belonged to a company of French soldiers. There are several belts of cartridges there, too, all under a brush heap that you will see near the same tree. They have been there for more than a week, but they are all right. I hid them myself, believing that one day they would be useful. Here we are. Now get ready and come out as I call for you.

“A big forkful of hay was soon dropped over to the stack, and with it went a French soldier. It was then that little Julien made a startling discovery. A squad of German cavalymen were galloping leisurely toward the haystack from the direction of the town, evidently with the intention of having a look at it.

“‘Hurry! The Boches are coming!’ urged the French boy. He pitched rapidly now, and with every forkful out went a French soldier. For some reason the German cavalymen had increased their pace and came on at a swift gallop. The last poilu came

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out when the Germans were about three hundred feet away, with Julien pitching hay as if his very life depended upon his efforts. Just at that instant, as Julien jerked up a forkful of hay, a French soldier's cap flew up into the air and fell to the ground on the side from which the Germans were approaching.

"The German troopers saw and understood. Little Julien also saw and understood, and he did not hesitate a second, but dived head first for the haystack. Quick as he was a volley of shots from the troopers' rifles whistled over him. Julien rolled down the side of the stack on the side next to the woods and ran into the forest, with the troopers coming after him and shooting as they came.

"The lad ran on until he heard the riders come crashing in among the trees, whereupon he threw himself down behind a log to one side of the path, and a few seconds later the cavalrymen dashed past him. What he was hoping was that the soldiers whom he

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had aided to escape had by this time found the rifles, and that they would give the Boches a surprise.

“‘All Boches are thick-heads,’ he muttered. ‘They haven’t even as good sense as a fly that will dodge the web of the spider. Ah!’

“Shots some distance ahead of him told him the Germans were firing and were being fired upon. The shooting was fast and furious for a few moments, then became scattering and finally ceased altogether. A moment later three German troopers came running out, their horses having been shot from under them. Then Julien decided that it was time for him to move. He knew it would be sure death to return to the village, so he went on down the path.

“‘Run!’ shouted a voice ahead. ‘They will be back with assistance and we shall all be taken.’

“‘Did you get all of them?’ eagerly questioned the boy, as he came running up to the men he had aided to escape.

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“‘Three got away. You must come with us.’

“‘I cannot. My parents—’

“A soldier grabbed him and yanked him along, though Julien struggled to free himself, believing that he could hide in the woods and creep home after dark and thus be near his parents to aid them if needed. He was, however, dragged along with the soldiers, because they knew that if he were left behind he would probably be caught, and if so the lad surely would be shot. It was but a few hours later when they arrived at their own lines, a grateful and happy group of poilus.

“On the following morning, the commanding officer, having been told of the heroic part played by the little French peasant boy, called him up before the regiment and recounted the story of the brave little man’s rescue of the poilus.

“‘It was but a trifle,’ murmured the abashed Julien.

“‘And it is for such trifles as these that

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we bestow the Cross of War,' answered the commanding officer, pinning the much-coveted decoration on the breast of the little patriot.

"That ought to be the end of the story, boys, but it is not. Through information that Julien was able to give the commanding officer, the French were able to train their artillery on that of the enemy and practically wipe it out of existence. The French then marched ahead, and after a brisk battle drove the Germans from the village.

"Julien was acclaimed a hero by all the villagers—by all except his father, who, though very proud of Julien's achievement, made him go out and draw all the hay back to the barn whence he took it, which the little patriot did willingly and happily, for did he not wear on his breast the thanks of the French government for drawing that hay out to the edge of the forest as a cover for the escape of the beloved soldiers of France?"

CHAPTER V

THE BOY WHO WORE A MONOCLE

“SOME ONE should have taken Julien’s father out behind the barn and given him a whipping,” observed one of the boys after Bomber Haynes had finished telling them about the Seven Soldiers and a Load of Hay.

“That, I was given to understand, was done, but in a different way. The French commander, when he learned of what the father had made little Julien do, sent for the parent and gave him such a lecture that he is not likely ever to offend in a like manner again.

“The story for to-day concerns another French boy, a sturdy lad of twelve ‘tender’ years, who also had been reared on a farm and was stronger than his years would indicate. He had been used to hard work on his

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father's farm, studying nights, going to school in the winter, and developing muscle and mind at the same time.

"This lad's name was Alain, and he was left alone when the Germans, sweeping through the little village in which he lived, had, purposely or otherwise, killed the boy's father and mother. Alain saved himself by crawling under the floor of his father's barn and hiding there until night, when he made his way on toward the French lines, which he eventually reached.

" 'I have come to join the army,' he announced when finally he found himself in the presence of the colonel of the French regiment.

" 'Yes, my lad, but you are too young,' objected the officer good-naturedly.

" 'The Boches have taken my father and mother; I have none left—only my beloved France can claim me now.'

" 'Alain, it would be better that you let me send you to Paris, where you may go to school.'

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“‘There will be schools just the same after the Boche is whipped, but there will not always be Boches to whip. I must do something to avenge my father and mother, my Colonel.’

“‘Yes, but what can you, a child, do in war?’ protested the commanding officer more for the purpose of drawing the lad out than to oppose him.

“‘Alain can shoot, and shoot straight. His father taught him to shoot when he was but a child, and he can throw bombs, too.’

“‘Bombs?’ questioned the officer, elevating his eyebrows. ‘Where did you learn to throw bombs?’

“‘I saw the French soldiers practicing when they were garrisoned near my home. I then determined that I, too, should learn to throw bombs, and one day be a bomber in the French army, and I began practicing with nice round stones until I could throw almost as far and as surely as the French bombers. See! This is the position one takes when he is about to hurl a bomb at the

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hated Boche,' said the lad, assuming the correct position of the bomber, the left hand pointed straight out at the mark, the right hand holding the bomb behind him. 'And then, woof!'

" 'That is very good,' approved the colonel. 'Still, I could not permit you to join the bombers just yet. I think, however, that you might make yourself useful in many little ways back of the firing line, and because you are alone in the world I shall adopt you as the mascot of the regiment, if that will please you.'

" 'Oh, I thank you, sir. You make Alain very happy indeed.'

"From that moment the little Frenchman became the pet of the regiment. The soldiers took a keen interest in instructing Alain in the arts of war, explaining to him all the details of the modern rifle, of machine guns and light artillery, and even the mechanism and operation of bombs, of which he already had a fairly good knowledge.

"Alain was quick to learn—he was an apt

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pupil in war as well as in peace. Now and then he was permitted to go up to the front line to carry orders to the officers there, and it was a diversion for the poilus to see his smiling face. Occasionally they would permit him to fire a rifle at the parapet of the German trenches off there in the distance, but what he really was yearning for was to take part in a battle, that he might really feel he was fighting for France.

“One night the troops went over the top for a big drive in the Marne sector. The artillery of both sides opened up and the very earth trembled under the thunder of exploding shells, but the booms and the crashes were music to his ears. All night the battle raged and Alain was in the thick of it, helping the wounded back, searching shell-holes for soldiers in distress, and giving water from his canteen to suffering brave men, thus endearing himself more than ever to the soldiers of France.

“With the dawning of the day the battle went on with renewed force. It was a criti-

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cal hour in the history of the war. To the north of Alain's regiment thousands of clean-cut American soldiers were battling, too, and driving back the Huns foot by foot, which gave the Frenchmen fresh courage and caused them to fight the harder.

"Late in the afternoon the Germans had been driven back for a long distance, but there were several invisible machine-gun nests that were causing the French no end of trouble. Thus far they had been unable to locate these nests, though several parties had been sent out to search for them. The keen eyes of little Alain were busy, too.

"'Why should I have eyes if not to see with?' he questioned of himself, and began a systematic searching of the landscape by fixing his eyes on one point steadily for some moments and then moving them to another. In that way, little by little, he covered the field and the edge of the woods some distance off to the left.

"At last his patience and thoroughness were rewarded by the sight of a succession

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of faint, quivering flashes that appeared to be more a trembling of heat waves in the air than the explosion of powder. He noticed, too, that with this peculiar quivering of the atmosphere came the rat-tat-tat of machine-gun fire.

“‘I have them,’ chuckled the lad. ‘Now I shall show my Colonel that I am a soldier, for I shall get the murdering Boches single-handed.’ All was excitement and no one paid any special heed to the little French boy, who came and went as he chose. Long since he had equipped himself with a rifle and a cartridge belt, but he had not used the weapon, seeing nothing at which to shoot. He now wished to add some bombs to his equipment, and, knowing where a supply was to be found, in a certain bomb-proof dugout, he hurried there and provided himself with all he could carry of the deadly missiles.

“Thus prepared, little Alain started out across the field, bearing to the left, and keeping low to avoid bullets and to hide his

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body from the view of the enemy as much as possible so that they might not discover what he was doing.

“Having taken a bearing before he started, he had a tall tree as a landmark to go by. The top of the tree had been shattered by a shell and hung in a tangled mass, threatening to crash to the earth at any moment. It was directly to the north of this tree that he was certain the machine-gun nest was located.

“Alain began turning in a broad semicircle, ever with his eyes on the shell-shattered tree, and soon he was down on all fours, creeping cautiously forward.

“‘It is there. Alain’s eyes did not play him tricks,’ he muttered as the sound of sputtering machine guns near at hand was plainly borne to his ears.

“Search as he might, however, he was unable to discover the hiding place of the machine gunners who were causing so much annoyance to the French troops. There was such a roar of firearms that it was difficult

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to place the sound of any single gun or group of guns.

“He finally decided to enter the woods and creep about until he either found the enemy gunners or was himself found by the enemy. Suddenly he discovered something. A helmeted head appeared just above what appeared to be a bed of moss and grass at the very edge of the forest and between him and his own lines.

“‘A Boche!’ exclaimed the little French boy under his breath. ‘I have found the machine-gun place.’

“The German head soon disappeared, and now Alain was able to locate the machine-gun bursts at the point where he had seen the German’s head. How many men were down there he did not know, but he proposed to find out in his own original way. Unlimbering his rifle and placing it beside him, he took two bombs and, after examining them critically, placed one beside the rifle.

“The lad now rose cautiously until he was standing at his full height. Drawing back

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the right hand, which held a loaded bomb with the cotter pin drawn—it was only the pressure of his thumb that now prevented the bomb from exploding in his hand—he aimed carefully with the left hand at a point several feet to one side of the place where he had seen the German head rise from the ground.

“Alain had a head on his shoulders, boys, as you can readily understand. Then he let fly. The bomb landed within a foot of the point at which he had aimed, but before it struck Alain was flat on his stomach behind a clump of bushes, for he well knew what was about to occur. You see he was quite close to the machine-gun emplacement, and when the bomb exploded it was certain to muss up the landscape for some distance about the place.

“It did. The bomb exploded with a tremendous report. Dirt and leaves and pieces of shrubbery were hurled into the air, falling in a shower over the machine-gun emplacement and over the bomber as well.

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But before these had ceased falling Alain had hurled another bomb that landed on the other side of the hidden machine-gun emplacement.

“‘Come out, you Boches!’ shouted the lone attacker. ‘Come out before I drop one on your cowardly heads. Bring your guns out with you. You are surrounded. Leave your other weapons where they are or you will be shot down before you get a chance to do any more damage. Out with you!’

“Men already were beginning to scramble from the machine-gun pit, holding their hands high above their heads, and were followed by a German captain.

“‘About face! Keep your hands over your heads!’ commanded the lad from behind the bush where he was hiding, this time not lying down, but crouching low, with rifle and another bomb ready for instant service. ‘I thought I told you to bring the machine gun with you. Herr Captain, you will go back and fetch the gun.’

“‘I am an officer. I refuse to perform

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such a menial task,' retorted the German captain.

"'All right. If you prefer a bullet in your back, you will not only get one, but you will get a volley. Are you going?'

"With a growl of anger and resentment the German captain returned to the pit and came up struggling with the machine gun.

"'Put it on your shoulder and obey orders. Twos, right; forward, march!'

"The Germans marched, Alain keeping a good, safe distance behind them and watching his prisoners—fifteen of them—narrowly. He made the men march close together so that in case, as he told them, they offered any resistance he could get them all with one bomb. The German machine-gunners apparently were quite willing to be made captives, for they knew that now their fighting days were over and that they would get good treatment and plenty to eat from their captors, the French. But had they got sight of Alain before he discovered them, that would have been the end of Alain.

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“The lad took a more direct course with his prisoners on the return journey, being eager to get back to the French lines as quickly as possible. This took him directly through the zone of fire and made traveling extremely perilous, but the little Frenchman walked very erect, his eyes dancing, his face lighted up with joy over his victory. He permitted his prisoners to crouch low as they hurried across the fields, but watched them narrowly for signs of treachery, as by this time they must have realized that their captor was a mere child. At any rate, they understood fully that the ‘child’ was a dangerous infant to trifle with.

“There were dugouts all over this part of the field, trenches new and old, barbed wire cunningly concealed under foliage, and other contrivances fashioned by the Germans to catch the enemy. All these Alain avoided, but not paying much attention to the dugouts.

“Finally, however, he came to a dugout that seemed to be of better construction than any

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others he had seen. It opened on a trench which had been under heavy fire all during the battle, and which had been deserted by the Germans, but something about it caused the child soldier to halt and eye it narrowly.

“ ‘Hulloa, down there!’ he called. There was no response. ‘I know how to smoke the Boches out if there are any in that hole,’ muttered the lad, who, after cautioning his prisoners to stand at a safe distance away with their backs to the scene, hurled a bomb over into the trench. It landed almost directly in front of the heavy wooden door that closed the entrance to the dugout. A loud explosion followed, the door was blown in, and rocks and dirt came tumbling down into the trench, which was torn to pieces by the explosion.

“ ‘Attention, you prisoners!’ commanded the lad, observing that his prisoners were becoming uneasy. ‘Come out from down there, Boches,’ he added.

“From the dugout two officers staggered out with arms raised above their heads.

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“‘Kamerad!’ they shouted in chorus. Eight other men followed them, scrambling from the trench, unarmed, plainly glad to be out of the hole, where they expected sooner or later to be buried alive by the French shells that had been falling about them for hours and that were still falling. To the delight of the boy, the man who led the others from the trench was a German major. This was indeed a find worth while. The major wore a monocle, or single eyeglass. Following the German was an under-lieutenant whose face wore a surly expression and who plainly did not like the idea of surrendering to a boy. The trouble was that the Germans did not know how many revengeful French soldiers might be just to the rear of the boy. They reasoned that this was a French trick to give the French an excuse for shooting them down if they tried to escape from the little fellow who had captured them. At any rate Alain held the whip hand and he knew it, but never for a minute did he relax his vigilance.

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“‘Herr Major, put down the eyeglass on that stone to the right of you,’ he commanded.

“The major obeyed with some hesitation.

“‘You will now relieve the Herr Captain of the machine gun. He is weary from carrying it so long.’

“The major turned an angry face toward his youthful captor and was on the point of uttering an insulting refusal, but the words died on his lips, for he found himself looking into the muzzle of the rifle that little Alain held leveled at him. The major thereupon shouldered the machine gun, and, with his companions, was lined up beside the machine-gun prisoners.

“‘Forward!’ commanded the boy. Alain snatched up the monocle as he passed the stone, and stuck the glass into his left eye. In this formation the procession moved again toward the French lines. From the latter the odd-appearing party were observed a long time before they reached the lines. Eventually it was discovered that

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these were Germans and that they were being driven in by a boy carrying a rifle in one hand and a bomb in the other.

“‘It is the boy Alain,’ exclaimed a lieutenant. ‘Look at him!’

“There was a shout when the little soldier, with an eyeglass stuck in his left eye, marched soberly in, every inch a Frenchman, driving his prisoners before him. There was just the suspicion of a swagger in his stride, and he saluted gravely and with as much precision as he could, when he passed the front-line officers.

“Right ahead, never stopping until he was before the field headquarters, went Alain, where, with military brevity, he reported to the commanding officer’s aide, ‘Twenty-two German privates and three officers.’

“The colonel in command gazed, first in amazement, then in half amusement, at the scene before him. Uttering a brief command, the boy was relieved of his prisoners, who were turned over to the Intelligence Department to be searched and questioned.

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Then, throwing an affectionate arm about Alain, he led the lad to his office.

“ ‘Now tell me about it,’ he urged.

“Alain did so without trying to glorify himself, explaining that he had gone out to try to capture the machine-gun nest that was causing the French so much annoyance.

“ ‘That is all, my Colonel,’ concluded the child.

“ ‘No, it is not all,’ exclaimed the commanding officer. ‘Such deeds as these shall be made known to all the world, and you shall wear the cross of honor that I now pin on your breast. There, wear it and remember that it is the gift of our beloved France to a brave little man who performed an heroic deed and who proved that he was a true Frenchman.’

“The colonel kissed the lad on both cheeks. Alain stood very stiffly, but his sturdy little form was trembling, and after he had saluted and hurried out, he rushed around to the rear of the headquarters building (which was nothing more than a temporary

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shack), sat down very undignifiedly, and with both hands hugged the precious decoration to his breast while the tears rolled down his cheeks.

“Fellows, do not for a minute think that Alain’s tears were the tears of a weakling. They were the tears of a man—a brave man who had exemplified by his deeds the spirit of the Children of France.”

CHAPTER VI

ALEXANDRÉ THE COURAGEOUS

THE eyes of the boys were glowing when the recital of Alain’s brave deeds came to a close. Every shoulder was thrown a little further back, every chin was set, and each boy pictured himself in the place of little Alain.

“What became of Alain afterwards?” questioned Abe Skinner.

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“He was later taken into the French Army and sent to a training school to learn to be an officer, and by this time I presume he is an officer, doing his duty simply and bravely, as every Frenchman does,” replied Sergeant Bomber Haynes. “Before we wind up our to-day’s session I will tell you another story about a courageous little French boy, whose courage was of an unusually high order.

“Alexandré was not quite thirteen, quiet for a boy and a little diffident, but he was all man, possessing the spirit that has made France so great and carried her on to victory in the face of such terrible obstacles. Alexandré lived in the village of Fontaine, not far from Cambrai and the Hindenburg Line, but one day the Germans, in superior numbers, drove the French back. The French did not stay driven back for very long, and attacked and finally drove the enemy out of the little village and back into their own lines.

“While the enemy was in Fontaine, however, they stripped the town of everything

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of value that they could lay their hands on, committing many cruel deeds, robbing the inhabitants of their valuables, taking all the food in the village, and leaving the people helpless and destitute.”

“The cowards!” breathed Abe Skinner.

“They are worse than that, Abe, and, like all such peoples, are cruel and relentless so long as they have the upper hand.

“When the Germans retreated from the village they took with them as prisoners all the French boys they could lay their hands on. *Alexandré* had the misfortune to be one of these. The little Frenchman protested with all his might against this indignity, and declared that no Boche could keep him for long. Because of his boasts he was kept under guard, or at least where some one would have an eye on him all the time, and he was put to work polishing officers’ shoes and other humiliating tasks, and beaten when he did not do his work well, which was often, because he took a pride in doing in the worst possible manner the tasks

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at which he was set. Every beating he received he felt was for France, so why should he not take his beatings, was the way the little fellow reasoned it out.

“One day he was ordered to take a rifle and fight.

“‘Fight against my beloved France?’ he demanded. ‘I will die first. I give you warning that if you place a rifle in my hands I shall shoot a Boche with it. That’s what *Alexandré* will do.’

“‘Then you shall be shot at once!’ thundered the German captain who had tried to press him into the enemy service. ‘I give you until to-morrow morning to think it over. All your companions whom we brought with us have accepted service with us and—’

“‘It is a lie!’ retorted *Alexandré* heatedly. ‘Bah! The truth is not in a Boche.’

“‘Take him away,’ commanded the captain.

“*Alexandré* was placed in a dugout where there was no light, where the mud was above

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his boot tops, and where the rats fought and squealed all the night through. He fought them, he raged at the cruelty of the Hun, and threatened under his breath to be even with them when once he was free. It seemed not to occur to the lad that the captain had promised that he should be shot if he did not agree to fight for the Fatherland.

“That night was the longest night that the little Frenchman ever had passed through. It came to an end shortly after daylight, when a sentry threw open the door and ordered him to come out. *Alexandré* did so, his face wearing a rebellious look, his chin set stubbornly.

“*Alexandré* was again conducted to the captain, who demanded to know if the boy had decided to accept the offer to fight for Germany, and have good food and clothes and a fine position in the army after he had gained a little in years.

“‘I fight only for France, not against France,’ he made bold reply.

“‘You will never fight for France,’ an-

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swered the captain. 'France soon will be under German rule, and all Frenchmen 'who have raised a hand against her will be shot.'

" 'I doubt not that you would do as you say if you had the chance. Herr Captain, you will never have the chance; your army will be whipped, your Kaiser put off his throne, your boasted Fatherland will soon be down on its knees begging for mercy. When it does the French will not shoot you, but they will make you pay dearly for the wrongs you have done to France and to little Belgium. The French are human, the Boches are murderers—they murder not only men, but women and children. I would die before I would fight for you!'

" 'Your desire shall be granted. Like all Frenchmen, you are a fool. Take him away.'

"Alexandré was led from the captain's quarters and toward the rear of the lines. His guard, finally reaching a small sapling-like tree, pushed him against it and bound him to it, then walked away and left him.

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A little faint from lack of food, and weary from fighting rats all night long, it was with difficulty that the lad was able to hold himself up. Nevertheless he stood up very stiffly, with head erect, scarcely moving, as observing eyes noted.

“The Boches were at their breakfast, at which they took their time. Finishing this an hour later, a squad of soldiers, with rifles over their shoulders, marched out on the field and came to rest a short distance from and facing the little French lad. While pretending to ignore them, *Alexandré* watched them narrowly.

“‘Perhaps they have come to shoot *Alexandré*,’ he told himself. ‘I fear them not.’

“A few moments later the captain sauntered out on the field and, in passing, spoke a few words to the sergeant in command of the squad. He then strolled over to the tree to which the boy was tied and eyed him disdainfully.

“‘You know what those men are?’ he questioned.

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“ ‘Boches!’ answered the lad.

“ ‘Yes, but they are more than that. They compose a firing squad. Can you not guess why they are here?’

“ ‘Alexandré never was a good guesser, but all German soldiers are murderers. Those are no different from the rest.’

“ ‘You are bold. It is not possible that you understand clearly. Yonder men are here to shoot a Frenchman—a little French fool. You are that one. What have you to say?’

“ ‘Alexandré merely shrugged his shoulders.

“ ‘You are telling me nothing new. You have said the same thing before. I do not fear you. I have but one life to give, and that belongs to France, and France can spare it better than she can the life of any one of her soldiers. By shooting women and children you do not weaken the French, you but give them strength, you lay up more trouble for yourselves.’

“ ‘Listen, little fool! If I spare your life

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and promise to send you back to Germany and place you in a military school where you can become big and great, will you promise to forget your own country and become a loyal little German soldier?"

"‘So that is what you are trying to do, Herr Captain, to turn the Children of France against their homeland and to make them over into nice little Boche murderers! Herr Captain, you have a bigger task on your hands than you think, for, like all Boches, you are a wooden-head. You failed to read the French correctly when you went to war, you missed it again when you drew England into the war, and you were all fools when you thought the great American people were afraid to fight. Afraid!’ Alexandré laughed aloud. ‘Why, Herr Captain, the boys of my age in our beloved America await with impatience the day when they shall get into the army and fight you. Afraid? Bah!’

“The captain stepped off to one side and made a signal to the sergeant in command

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of the firing squad, which quickly came to attention. In the meantime little Alexandré's mind was working rapidly. He could not quite understand why, if the captain proposed to shoot him, he should have delayed so long—spent so much time in profitless parley.

“‘Attention!’ The voice of the commanding officer rang out sternly. At the command the men of the firing squad brought their rifles into position, muzzles pointing toward the ground.

“‘Take aim! Little fool, do you wish to be blindfolded?’ questioned the Herr Captain.

“‘A Frenchman is unafraid,’ answered the boy simply, turning his eyes toward the firing squad.

“Alexandré was smiling as he looked straight into the muzzles of the rifles facing him. ‘For France,’ he murmured.

“‘Fire!’

“Eight rifles rang out in a crashing volley.

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“Instead of crumpling up with eight bullets in his body, little Alexandré still stood smiling, his face flushed, though a slight paleness showed about the lips. He was unhurt.

“‘Make ready! Take aim! Fire!’ commanded the captain.

“Again the eight rifles crashed out in volley, but still the plucky lad held his smile and his eyes challenged the Hun captain to do his worst.

“‘You are too brave to be a Frenchman,’ sneered the officer, but with a note of admiration in his tone.

“‘The next, I take it, Herr Captain, will be solid bullets,’ retorted Alexandré.

“‘The next will be, but for now you are to be spared. I was trying you out for a purpose. You have stood the test. When next you are stood up before a squad their rifles will be loaded with bullets. Blank cartridges were fired at you this time!’ The captain grinned. ‘Take him to the stable and feed him. I shall wish to talk with him again this evening.’

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“This time *Alexandré* was conducted to a barn that stood in the fields just outside the immediate base where the German regiment was billeted. He was led to the granary, a small, square room lined with tin to keep out the mice, and in which there were large bins with removable boards. A small window opened out on the rear yard of the barn.

“‘If you try to escape you will be shot,’ warned his guard.

“The guard left him without another word, padlocking the door behind him. *Alexandré* sprang lightly to the door, and with an ear against it listened intently. He could hear the guard moving softly about out there, but after a short time the guard left the building. It was then that the boy took a board from a bin and, bracing it against a partition, crawled up to the window at the peak of the low roof. He peered out and discovered the guard making a circuit of the barn, though the boy saw to it that the German did not see him. After a time the sentry went away, whereupon

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Alexandré put the board back where he found it and, stretching himself out on the floor, went to sleep.

“When he awakened it was late in the day—in fact, it was almost night. On the granary floor just inside the door had been placed, while he slept, half a small loaf of bread and a tin of water. The little Frenchman lost no time in eating the bread and drinking the water, for he was both hungry and thirsty, and the meager meal freshened him up wonderfully.

“Just before dark a guard thrust in another chunk of bread and poured a little water into the can, for which the boy thanked him politely. After a keen look about the granary the guard went away. The lad was about to begin eating when he suddenly decided that he would put the bread in his pocket to eat when he was hungrier. He helped himself liberally to the water, and then stationed himself at the window. There he clung until some time after dark, watching the barnyard and the field beyond.

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“‘The hour to go has arrived,’ he muttered finally. It was but the work of a minute or less to remove the window, which he stood in a bin out of sight, and, thrusting his head out, looked about him as well as he could in the darkness. *Alexandré* then let himself out backwards. The window opening was so small that he was obliged to do considerable wriggling to get through, but finally he managed to get out with the loss of some skin from his shoulders.

“His first work was to creep around the corner of the barn to learn if the guard was still there. He was. *Alexandré* nearly stepped on him. The fellow was asleep with his back against the barn, his rifle standing against the building within easy reach of his hand.

“The little Frenchman’s hand stole out and cautiously lifted the rifle clear and into the crook of his arm. As noiselessly as a cat could tread, he stole away into the darkness, carrying the rifle with him.

“*Alexandré* was not heading directly to-

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ward the French lines, for there was a German army between him and his own people. He bore off to the north, hoping to be able to make his way around the right flank of the Germans. Just after midnight he came to a forest, and, not knowing his way through the woods, he lay down and went to sleep.

“In the meantime the guard, with two other soldiers, set out to find the boy. More by good luck than otherwise they followed the general direction taken by the little Frenchman, and just after daylight they found the spot where he had slept and eaten his piece of bread. His cap lay on the ground at that spot, which led them to believe he had left in a hurry. Broken twigs and footprints in the soft turf, in spots, and indications of haste, verified their suspicion, so they pressed on, following the trail as well as they knew how.

It was near midday when they stopped for a halt and a rest, and to talk over their further movements—for they were getting

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rather nearer to the French lines than they wished—and it was there they got a shock.

“The three soldiers had stood their rifles against a tree before sitting down, and removed their helmets. As they sat discussing the situation a calm, youthful voice from somewhere in the bushes, saying, ‘Hello, Boches,’ caused them to leap to their feet.

“‘Sit down again, you Boches. I have something to say to you. I—’

“The three men sprang for their rifles, but there were no rifles there. The weapons had most mysteriously disappeared.

“‘I have your guns, Herr Boches, and if you don’t sit down I will shoot your legs from under you so you will sit down more quickly than you ever did before.’

“Alexandré had been hiding when the soldiers came up, and, after observing them and the position of their weapons, decided that he would get the guns and then capture the men. The rifles were far enough away from the soldiers to permit his taking them without being observed, but he had to work

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with great caution, and now the men were at his mercy and they knew it.

“‘Listen to the words of Alexandré,’ he said.

“‘It is the prisoner,’ gasped the guard who had allowed him to escape.

“‘The same, Herr Boche. But listen! To go back without me means that your dear Herr Captain will shoot you. To go back without your rifles and to confess that a boy took them away from you makes death certain for all of you. I could easily shoot you where you stand, but the French are not murderers like the Huns; they are human beings. I will spare you so long as you obey orders, but, if you try to escape, Alexandré surely will shoot you. Put on your hats and get up.’

“The men knew that what the lad had said regarding their captain was true, and therefore they were quite willing to be captured. They promised that they would obey the commands of their captor, and a few minutes later the party set off through the for-

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est, with the little Frenchman following them with rifle at ready.

“It was late in the afternoon when they emerged from the forest. Alexandré halted to look about him and get his bearings and nodded with satisfaction when he discovered landmarks with which he was familiar. Weary, but still full of determination, he ordered the men to press on, and just before dusk he encountered a French patrol.

“‘Who are you?’ they demanded, eyeing the lad keenly.

“‘I am a Frenchman,’ was the proud reply, ‘and these are my prisoners. I would report to your commanding officer at once.’

“‘You will do that whether you wish to or not,’ answered the sergeant in command of the patrol. ‘No doubt you are all right, but you know this is war and we must be careful.’

“Reaching the lines after dark Alexandré was detained with his prisoners in a cow shed with a guard over them, as the commanding officer and his subordinates were

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too busy to bother with three prisoners and a boy who might or might not be one of them.

“Alexandré was too good a soldier to grumble, so he lay down and went to sleep on the floor. On the following morning he was taken before a captain in the Intelligence Department, to whom he related the story of his own capture, his escape, and the capture of the German soldiers who had gone out to take him.

“The captain gazed upon the little fellow with admiration.

“‘It is of such material that the soldiers of France are made,’ he said feelingly. ‘You shall have safe conduct to your home, and you shall be cited for bravery. May you live long to serve France and make your country proud of you, as they will be when hearing of your brave exploits!’

“The captain kissed the little hero on both cheeks, then settled down to the business of the moment, which was that of questioning Alexandré on what he had discovered while in the enemy’s lines. The lad gave the

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French officer much valuable information, information that the captain had been trying to obtain ever since the Huns had taken up their new position. Then he sent for a poilu to take him back to his village, where the story of his exploits was soon spread about and where he was acclaimed as a hero.

“Some days later, *Alexandré* received a long official envelope from Paris, and the letter enclosed told him how proud France and its President were to know that he had set such a shining example for the youth of his country.”

CHAPTER VII

THE LITTLE SCOUT OF CAMBRAI WOOD

“JEAN was his name and he was a stupid-looking boy,” said Bomber Haynes when, several days later, he stopped at the school-house in the afternoon for an hour or so with the boys.

“Jean was a peasant boy who had been reared in the vicinity of Cambrai Wood and knew every foot of the country thereabouts. He was only fourteen, but he had a keen mind and a heart that beat for France. Like many French lads, hundreds of them, he had attached himself to the army and was permitted to move along with it, doing odd jobs and making himself generally useful. As was the case with many of his kind, his parents had been lost when the Germans swept over the place where he lived, and he

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did not know whether his mother and father were living or dead.

“He was a part of the fighting forces of France, unofficially, but he did his duty in really a bigger way than if he had carried a rifle and gone over the top to engage in hand-to-hand conflict. As a matter of fact, he did go over the top several times when the company officers either did not chance to observe him, or else looked the other way on purpose while Jean scrambled over the parapet and lost himself in the mass of charging soldiers. About this charging, perhaps you do not know that there is seldom any brilliant dash about it, such as we are used to seeing in pictures, and as they used to do in earlier wars.”

“Yes, they creep along,” spoke up one of the boys.

“For some time the French commander on that sector had been seeking to get information as to the strength of the enemy before him, the location of his heavy artillery and his ammunition dumps. These latter are

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great piles of shells, usually camouflaged or covered so that the observation flying machines cannot find them.

“Time and time again night patrols had been sent out to capture Germans to be questioned, but from none of the men captured were the French able to get the desired information.

“All this came to the ears of Jean because he was much among the officers, carrying messages for them and performing other services. He thought over this, day and night, then one day he asked permission to speak to the colonel on a matter of importance. The request was granted. Several officers were in conference with the colonel when little Jean entered and came smartly to attention, saluting with as fine precision as any veteran in the service could do. The officers smiled and nodded approvingly.

“‘Well?’ questioned the colonel.

“‘If I may make so bold as to speak, my Colonel, I think Jean can do it,’ he said.

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“ ‘Do what?’

“ ‘Find out about the Boches, how many of them there are over there, where their artillery is and where the dumps are, so that our brave birdmen may drop bombs on them.’

“The officers glanced at each other amusedly, for all this was a strictly confidential staff matter.

“ ‘What makes you think we wish this information?’ questioned the colonel.

“ ‘Jean knows that you do. He has ears and with them he hears many things—things that he does not speak of, for a soldier must not talk of the things he hears.’

“ ‘Excellent,’ approved the colonel. ‘And what is it that you propose to do?’

“ ‘It is not that I propose. I ask the privilege of serving my beloved country by getting the information you wish.’

“ ‘What I should like to hear is how you propose to accomplish this task where so many have failed,’ urged the colonel half amusedly.

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“ ‘I should, of course, go into the German lines for it, my Colonel.’

“ ‘Impossible! You would be sure to be captured and shot.’

“ ‘Captured I might be, my Colonel, but Jean looks so much the fool that they would take him as he looks and put him to work, for the Boches are more stupid than the cows of the fields that do not know enough to run and hide when the shells begin to fall about them, as you have no doubt many times observed.’

“The officers laughed heartily at this, but it was plain that they were becoming interested in what little Jean had proposed.

“ ‘We will take for granted that you can do what you say, and we will assume that you have succeeded to the point of getting within the German lines. Now how would you propose to get the information that you think we wish; and, lastly, how would you get this information to us?’

“ ‘I should come back to you with it, my Colonel.’

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“ ‘Not if you were taken prisoner and shot, Jean.’

“ ‘Jean looks like too big a fool to be worth shooting. It is only the clever men, like some of those my Colonel has sent over, who are shot.’

“The little soldier’s shot went home, for several clever scouts, whom the colonel had sent across to get the desired information, had been captured and shot, though he was amazed to hear that Jean knew all about it. The colonel tried to look stern, while the other officers passed hands across their faces to hide their grins. It was plain to all that little Jean was far from being the fool that he appeared to be, and they began to wonder if, after all, his proposal did not have some merit in it.

“ ‘You are bold, my son,’ observed the colonel.

“ ‘I do not intend so to be, my Colonel. Have I your permission to go over?’

“ ‘That I shall have to consider for a time. If you were a man I should say yes, but,

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Jean, you are a mere child, and the French do not send children to their deaths, as the Huns do.'

" 'If at any time you should get a letter signed by me, you will know that you have given me permission to go over there and that I have succeeded, my Colonel.'

" 'You will not go without my permission!' returned the colonel sternly.

" 'No, sir; not of my own free will. Is that all, sir?'

"The colonel nodded and Jean, saluting, withdrew.

" 'You will hear from that queer fellow,' spoke up a captain after the lad's departure.

" 'He is very smart. I believe he can serve us well in many ways, but I cannot permit him to do this thing. It is impossible.' The officers then resumed their discussion of a proposed attack that they had been planning when Jean was received.

"In the meantime the little French boy went about his duties in his usual plodding manner.

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“The plans for the attack were carefully laid, and the zero hour, when the men were to go over the top, was set for one o’clock on the following morning. Secret as the plans of the colonel and his staff were, Jean knew that they were going over, and somehow managed to come very close to guessing the hour when the movement was to take place. He decided to go with them.

“For fear that he might be sent back, he crept up to the rear of the French front-line trench some time after dark and lay down to wait and to watch, though he was above ground and very much exposed to the occasional shelling of the German guns. He was, however, rather well used to being shelled and never gave very much heed to it.

“Shortly after midnight, quiet activity in the trench below him told the boy that he had not been mistaken, and that preparations were being made for a big attack, for the front-line trench was rapidly filling up with men who were quietly slipping in from the communicating trenches.

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“The troops went over the top at one o’clock in the morning. He waited until they were well clear and out in the field, then slipped over into the trench, climbed the parapet and started on after them.

“ ‘Somebody is going to catch it to-night,’ muttered Jean. ‘Somebody is catching it,’ he added as a shell burst ahead of him and a whole group of soldiers went down under the explosion. The boy flattened himself on the ground until the shower of shell fragments had fallen; then he rose and plodded along, stopping by the group of fallen soldiers to see if there were anything that he could do for them. There was not. They were beyond human help.

“Soon the second wave caught up with and passed him. Jean fell in behind this second wave and quickened his pace somewhat, for he did not wish to be left too far in the rear.

“By now the French artillery was hurling tons of projectiles into the forest, which was lighted up by their explosions and the fires that they started. Directly ahead the Ger-

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mans also were firing from trenches and from bomb-proofs and shell holes, and a terrible din was in the ears of the little French boy. All the time he kept working his way toward the Cambrai Wood. This he could not do very rapidly because he would be liable to get into the fire from his own army.

“It was about half past three o’clock in the morning when Jean finally got within easy reaching distance of the Wood. Daylight soon would be upon them and he knew that he must make the effort to get into the forest soon, or his opportunity would be lost until the next night and perhaps altogether. It was one thing to walk deliberately into the enemy lines during a battle, and another to do it when there was no battle on. In the latter case he would at once lay himself open to suspicion; in the former he stood a chance of having a reasonable excuse for being there.

“Jean skulked into the woods with more quickness than one would have believed him capable of. He took a course toward the

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rear of the German lines that curved around the active sector, now and then dropping down when he found himself in range of a German machine gun. All the time, however, Jean was getting further and further into the Hun lines. Far back in the forest, in a space of some two acres where the large trees had been felled, he found a huge ammunition dump. Men were actively at work there, passing out shells to meet the demands of the various guns up at the front.

“Gazing up at the stars and making such calculations as he could of the direction in which he had been traveling, he arrived at a very fair estimate of the location of the dump, and determined to visit it again if he got the opportunity. That this was only a temporary ammunition dump, he understood. The really worth-while ammunition dumps naturally would be further back.

“The first streaks of dawn were showing in the sky when he turned away from the ammunition dump and began tramping into the protection of the forest. He kept on until

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it was no longer safe to continue, and then lay down at the base of a tree and went to sleep.

“You see little Jean felt certain that he would be discovered, but that was what he wished. It was a part of his shrewd little plan to be taken prisoner and conducted further back, for in that way he would be able to see more without laying himself open to suspicion. He actually went to sleep, and when he awakened the sun was high in the heavens and some one was roughly shaking him by the shoulder.

“‘Who are you?’ demanded a rough, rasping German voice.

“‘I am a Frenchman. Go away and let me sleep,’ he answered in the same language, which, having lived near the border for so long, he was able to speak.

“‘So? A Frenchman? Come with me.’ He dragged rather than led the boy, Jean rubbing his eyes sleepily, to the sergeant, who in turn sent him to a corporal’s guard where other prisoners were herded. With

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these Jean held no conversation. He appeared to be too stupid to talk. After leaning sleepily against a tree for more than an hour, during which he heard remarks made not very complimentary to himself, he, with the other prisoners, was driven further into the woods and on toward the rear.

"They had not gone more than a couple of miles when they were halted before a series of bomb-proof dugouts. There were many soldiers and officers about, and he had no difficulty in surmising that this was a field headquarters. There were high and low officers there, and all was activity. He learned from their conversation that the battle had not gone well with the French, that the latter had not succeeded in getting into the woods, and that for the time being the battle was practically over.

"A corporal finally shook him awake and dragged him to the dugout, where Jean was faced by a German captain who spoke to him in German, asking his name.

"Jean shook his head, which the captain

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interpreted as meaning that the boy did not understand.

“ ‘Who are you?’ the captain then demanded in French.

“ ‘I am a Frenchman,’ was the brief reply.

“ ‘Your name—what is it?’ snapped the captain with a show of impatience.

“ ‘Jean.’

“ ‘Jean what?’

“ ‘I—I don’t know. I am a Frenchman.’

“The German captain raised a foot and kicked the little French boy. It hurt dreadfully, but Jean merely blinked and rubbed the spot on which the Hun’s boot had landed.

“ ‘What were you doing on the field with the army? Fighting, I suppose. The French make old women and children fight. I say, what were you doing on the field?’

“ ‘Carrying water. The French made Jean work until his back was nearly broken. Jean does not like to work; he would sleep.’

“ ‘How many men have the French opposed to us out there?’

“ ‘Jean does not know. Many.’

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“ ‘How many batteries?’

“ ‘Many.’

“ ‘Who is in command?’

“Jean blinked and thought and several times opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again, as if not certain of the reply he would make. Finally he blurted out the word Fouchard. The latter was a general in the French army, but he was in command of another sector further north.

“The German officer nodded. He felt that he had at least got some information out of his stupid prisoner, and from his expression Jean shrewdly guessed that none of the other prisoners had told him the name of the commanding officer in the present drive.

“ ‘What did General Fouchard expect to gain by attacking us last night?’ questioned the captain.

“ ‘Boches!’ The word came out almost explosively, drawing a laugh from the Hun captain and the under-officers with him.

“ ‘That is the time he showed himself to be possessed of a touch of human intelli-

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gence. The boy is more than half fool and the rest of him is harmless. Take him back with the others and set him to work. He understands no German. That I could see by watching his face when addressing him in German. Make him work hard, as a French dog should.' The captain waved the boy away.

"In company with the other prisoners, Jean was conducted to the rear lines of the Germans, and all were put into an enclosure surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by sentries. For the first day and night he had little to do, but on the second day he was permitted to go outside and work at odd jobs, getting many a kick and cuff from Hun officers and privates alike. At night he was returned to the enclosure. He was glad of this, for he was observing his fellow prisoners critically.

"From day to day Jean was given a little more liberty and he grew more and more stupid, and his body was black and blue from kicks and blows. Just the same, he

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was getting valuable information. From a soldier he got information about gun emplacements; from another he learned the location of some of the smaller ammunition dumps, and the big, important ammunition dumps he had discovered himself. He collected a vast fund of information that his commanding officer would give a great deal to have, and, too, Jean had picked out certain of his fellow prisoners to use in getting information back to the French.

“ ‘Why don’t you escape, now that you have the chance?’ he said to one of these one evening.

“ ‘The prisoner said he would do so quickly enough if he felt sure that he had a chance.

“ ‘It is easy. After midnight there is but one guard and he stops at one o’clock to eat his bread and cheese. I will show you the way out if you will carry a letter to the French colonel.’

“ ‘You are a spy?’

“ ‘No, I am a fool. Be ready at midnight. Listen and I will tell you how to do it.’ Jean

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then gave very brief directions for reaching the French lines, warning the French soldier, however, that he must ever be on the watch for roving German patrols, and that if captured he must make away with the letter for the French colonel, even if he had to make a meal of it.

“The soldier gave his word. He was too delighted at the opportunity for escape to refuse anything.

“That night little Jean pretended to sleep, but did not, and promptly at midnight crept out into the open pen, where he lay flat on the ground, watching the guard and everything else in his surroundings. Finally the guard went to his bread and cheese, and it was then that the French boy hurried to the side of his messenger.

“‘The hour has arrived,’ he whispered. ‘All is well. Come!’

“With two sticks with niches cut in their ends he breached two of the barbed wires of the enclosure apart just sufficiently to let a man through, but even at that the prisoner’s



PRESSED A LETTER INTO HIS HAND

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clothing was torn and his flesh scratched in squeezing through. Before he left, Jean pressed a letter into his hand.

“ ‘Remember, my poilu, it is for France. Sacrifice your life if need, but forget that such a person as Jean exists. Give my commander no information about me save to say that I am well, and that I am having a pleasant vacation where all that I have to do is to work and be kicked. Good-bye.’ ”

“The next twenty-four hours were anxious ones for Jean. It was not until late the following day that the prisoner was missed. On the morning of the second day the boy was delighted, upon hearing the buzz of an airplane, to discover that it was a French observation plane. About this time the French artillery opened up and great shells went screaming high over head. Jean could see the air observer making smoke signals to the gunners back there, and soon there came an explosion that shook the earth.

“ ‘It is well. My Colonel received my letter and his shells have blown up an ammu-

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munition dump. He knows now that little Jean is a useful fool. 'Vive la France!' he murmured under his breath.

"Before long an explosion greater than the first told the lad that the main ammunition dump had been located and blown up. His happiness was great. There was much excitement among the German officers. How the French had succeeded so well in locating these hidden ammunition dumps they could not understand, as before the close of that day two other smaller dumps were fired and blown up. Not alone this, but three hidden Hun bases in the forest were shelled by artillery and bombed by airplanes.

"A week later another French prisoner escaped, and with him went another message to the commanding officer of little Jean's regiment, with the result that a few days later the Germans again suffered heavily from French artillery and bombing planes.

"By now they began to realize that the French were getting accurate information

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from the German lines. Prisoners were watched, Jean was watched, but not for long because he was such a thick-head that they did not credit him with having sense enough to do the clever work that had been accomplished. Then, again, they laid most of their ill luck to the prisoners who had escaped, and lines were drawn still more tightly. This for a time stopped the accurate work of the French guns and bombing planes.

“Finally, however, another prisoner escaped, and his escape was followed in due time by more successful bombing, and this time the Germans had every one of their prisoners in this sector up before the intelligence officers, who threatened, if they failed to find the spy, to shoot all the prisoners. Once more they failed to secure the information they sought, nor did they shoot any prisoners, knowing very well that the French would retaliate by shooting as many German prisoners.

“It was more difficult now for French

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prisoners to escape, because additional guards had been put about the Hun prison pen, so little Jean possessed his soul in patience and plodded methodically about his work, doing everything badly and earning the title 'Dumb Ox' from his captors, until finally one night only one guard was on duty from midnight until four in the morning. That night another prisoner made his escape, and next day vital spots back of the German lines were subjected to a storm of heavy shells and bombs, wiping many of them out of existence.

"The Germans now knew to a certainty that there was a spy in the pen and they set to work methodically to apprehend him, but failed again. It was three weeks later, however, when there came another escape, but no shelling followed. By that sign little Jean knew that his plans had gone wrong and that this last messenger had failed to reach his destination. He knew, too, that he was in great danger, but he did not in the slightest change his expression nor his ways.

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“Then the end came suddenly. One night, well along toward morning, he was roughly dragged from his blanket and taken before a group of stern-faced officers. As he stood before them they gazed sternly at the lad, saying no word for a long time. Jean gave back their gaze in his accustomed stupid way.

“‘So you are the spy, eh?’ demanded a captain finally.

“‘Eh?’ answered Jean, blinking as if he did not comprehend the words.

“‘Here,’ continued the officer, ‘is the evidence. Your messenger tore it up and threw away the pieces when he was captured, but we have pieced it together. Not all of it is intelligible to us, but we have deciphered enough to satisfy us. It is signed Jean The Fool. A fine fool you are, but you shall no longer give information to the dogs over there. What have you to say?’

“Instead of saying anything Jean simply blinked, his lower jaw sagged and his tongue was stuck up to the roof of his mouth. It

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seemed almost impossible of belief that here was a brain so keen as to plan and execute escapes and give information to the enemy as Jean had done.

“ ‘For this you know the penalty?’

“ ‘What has Jean done?’ questioned the lad, a puzzled expression now appearing on his face.

“ ‘He has done enough. How many other spies are there out there in the pen?’

“ ‘Jean knows of no spies among the prisoners; Jean knows little about anything.’

“ ‘He will know still less by sunrise,’ was the significant reply. ‘That is all. You will spy no more and we shall serve you as we do all such French dogs. Take him away.’

“This time the boy was taken to a dark, ill-smelling dugout and a guard was placed over him. What thoughts passed through his keen little mind none but himself ever knew, but Jean was a Frenchman and he was ready to face whatever fate was in store for him.

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“Shortly after daylight the little scout was taken from his prison dugout and, with a guard on either side of him, was conducted to an open space, where he was stood up against a tree.

“A firing squad stood a short distance from him, leaning on their rifles, laughing and talking. They were there to end the life of a boy, but he was only a Frenchman and there was no mercy in their hearts. The captain who had questioned him a few hours before walked slowly over to the little Frenchman leaning against the tree.

“‘Frenchman, when we are ready you are at liberty to run if you wish. It will be more sport for the firing squad to shoot you as they would a rabbit. I have no doubt they will enjoy it more than you will.’

“Jean drew himself up to his full height and with great dignity replied:

“‘A Frenchman never runs away, Herr Captain.’

“The captain shrugged his shoulders. Just then several guards marched on the

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field with a group of French prisoners, some of them officers. These were lined up at one side about midway between the firing squad and the little French lad. The captain turned to these.

“‘Prisoners, this boy is a spy. He is a desperate character. He fooled us for a long time, but of course we caught him at last, and he is to be executed, as every despicable Frenchman should be the moment he gets into our hands. Let it be a lesson to you lest you too share his fate.’

“There were black looks on the faces of the prisoners.

“‘Have you anything you wish to say?’ questioned the captain, turning to the boy. ‘You see I am kind, more kind than you or any of your race deserve.’

“‘Jean has much to say, but, as the saying can do no good, it were better left unsaid. I am ready.’

“The captain gave the signal and the men of the firing squad raised their rifles. All at once little Jean’s face lost its character-

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istic idiotic look, his eyes lighted up with a fire that none of those before him ever had seen there before and his whole countenance was transformed.

“ ‘Fire!’

“ ‘Long live France!’ cried the shrill voice of the victim of German cruelty. The words were his last, for, as ‘France’ was still on his lips, his slender form fell forward and lay still.

“Thus, my little friends, died a boy hero of France. He died for his country after serving her well, and in the little village where he was born and reared to-day there stands a crude monument which one day will give place to a finer one, on which has been carved the inscription: ‘To the Memory of a Little Hero of France, Jean Fauvre, Who Died Gloriously That His Country Might Live.’ ”

CHAPTER VIII

PIERRE THE PEPPER

“THERE are thousands like Jean among the little boys of France,” began Bomber Haynes when his young friends had gathered in the school yard on another occasion to listen to another story about the youthful heroes of France. “Each and every one of them is eager and willing to make any sacrifice if by so doing they can serve their beloved country in even a small way.

“The story that I shall tell you to-day is about little Pierre who came to be known as Pierre the Pepper. Pierre had red hair, very red, and his temper was as fiery as his hair. He lived with an uncle and an aunt near the Lorraine frontier, where he went to school, his parents being peasant farmers further out in the country.

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“When the war broke out little Pierre was filled with enthusiasm, and, though only fourteen, he was determined to fight for his country. Of course his parents, as well as his uncle and aunt, refused to listen to his appeals.

“Then came the invasion, the day when the Germans swept the French back and took the village of Jumeau, where Pierre lived. The attack was a surprise, and the French were badly cut to pieces, for they had constituted only a small garrison force.

“The Germans swept in, after routing the French, clearing the streets and capturing many men, some of whom they found in the houses of the villagers. Every house was searched, including the one in which Pierre lived, which was situated on the outer edge of the village to the north, where the uncle worked a small plot of land. It was an exciting time, and Pierre was burning with indignation over the brutality shown by the Huns to the people of the village.

“Pierre and his uncle and aunt were sit-

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ting in their home that evening, talking of the exciting events of the afternoon, when there came a tap at the kitchen door. The uncle opened the door, fully expecting to see a German standing there.

“Pierre, not far behind the uncle, was peering at the stranger, first with a scowl on his youthful face, then with an expression of wonder. It was an aviator, dressed in his rubber suit, the knitted helmet still on his head, his goggles tipped up high on the forehead.

“‘Can you tell me where I am?’ he asked in pure French.

“‘Who are you?’ demanded the uncle.

“‘A flier, attached to the French army. Running out of gas I was obliged to come down about three kilometers north of here. I had been lost for more than two hours in the fog. Will it be possible for me to get some gas in this village?’

“‘You might ask the Boches for some,’ replied the uncle with irony in his tone.

“‘The Boches took the town this after-

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noon, my Frenchman,' added Pierre. 'How did you get through the lines?'

"For a moment the flier was too amazed to speak.

" 'I walked straight to the village without seeing a single Boche,' he finally answered. 'Where are they?'

" 'Everywhere,' returned the uncle. 'They have been here and they are liable to be here again at any time.'

"The aviator pondered a moment, then said that he must get some petrol and get away, as he did not fancy letting a perfectly good fighting airplane fall into the hands of the Huns. Failing to get the fuel he declared that he must go back and destroy the machine, so that it might not be captured by the Germans.

" 'I fear we cannot help you, but we will secrete you in the house for the night, and perhaps a way may be found for you to get away on the morrow,' offered the uncle. 'I know of no petrol in the village.'

" 'Pierre knows where there is some,' in-

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terjected the red-headed boy. 'I know, for the French fliers occasionally made landings here and I used to watch them filling their tanks with petrol.'

" 'Where?' demanded the birdman eagerly. 'Lead me to it. You are a little patriot indeed.'

" 'The stuff is buried in a farm shed where the owner keeps sheep in the winter, unless the French troops took it away with them, and I think they went away in too big a hurry for that. Pierre will go with you and help you,' declared the boy resolutely. 'You and I will dispose of any sentries we meet, but you must let me go ahead and look for them. I know the land better than you do.'

" 'Pierre, you must be careful,' urged the boy's aunt.

" 'It is for France,' answered the boy simply. 'They once had cans there by the storage place, but I don't know whether there are any there now or not. We had better take a pail to carry the petrol in, in

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case there should be no cans. I am ready, Monsieur.'

"They set out together, Pierre, before leaving, halting in the kitchen, where he took a handful of red pepper from a can, and, carefully wrapping it in a piece of paper, deposited it in his pocket, while the Frenchman eyed him questioningly.

" 'It is good for man and beast,' observed the boy dryly. 'I once used it to quiet a neighbor's dog that always tried to bite me when I passed his yard. It cured the dog, and so will it cure any ugly Boche.'

"Pierre led the way, proceeding some little distance ahead of his companion, both moving with great caution. That there were Germans ahead of them as well as behind them, the boy was positive, but he did not know where they were, though he was proceeding as if the enemy were right in front of him, creeping along in a crouching position, every faculty on the alert. The birdman was going along in the same manner, some little distance behind Pierre.

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“ ‘Halt! Who goes?’

“Pierre jumped, as a soldier stepped from behind a tree and thrust a bayonet toward the little fellow.

“ ‘Friend,’ answered Pierre after a few seconds of indecision.

“ ‘No, you are French. Advance!’ replied the German sentry sternly.

“ ‘Yes, but I am only a lad,’ pleaded Pierre, stepping slowly forward, and the sentry, observing that this was true, lowered his rifle.

“ ‘You cannot pass. Go back or I shall have to shoot you.’

“ ‘Oh, no, you will not. Pierre is not so easily disposed of. He too can fight. Pierre can fight you.’

“The sentry uttered a half grunting laugh.

“ ‘You can fight? How?’

“ ‘Just like this,’ retorted the Pepper, hurling a handful of red pepper full into the face of the sentry.

“The German uttered a yell and began dancing about rubbing his eyes, but the more

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he rubbed the more the stuff burned him. To add to his troubles, the sentry began to sneeze, his rifle dropped from his hands, and, throwing himself on the ground, he rolled over and over, crying out in his distress. The boy gazed at his victim with a brief expression of regret on his face.

“‘Come,’ cried Pierre to the birdman. ‘The Boche is well seasoned with pepper, and I have a rifle,’ he added, snatching up the weapon, as the French flier came up. ‘We must hurry now.’

“‘First we will tie this fellow so he cannot get away and give the alarm, but be as quiet as you can. There will be more of them hereabouts. You are indeed a peppery enemy to meet.’

“The Frenchman tore up the German’s coat, and with the pieces bound the fellow hand and foot, then placed a gag in his mouth.

“‘There, Pierre, I think he will be all right unless some of his kind should chance to discover him.’ Pierre nodded his under-

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standing, and together the two started on, this time more rapidly than before, for each believed that they were outside of the German line of sentries, which, as a matter of fact, they were. This line was nearer to the village than Pierre had thought, which meant that the sheep shed where the gasoline was stored was some distance outside of the German lines.

“They reached the shed and the lad immediately began digging in a sheep rack, throwing out armfuls of straw, revealing in a few moments a galvanized tank several feet in length. The tank was locked with a padlock. Try as they would, they could not break it open.

“‘I know how to get the lock off,’ announced the aviator. Drawing his revolver he placed it against the lock and pulled the trigger. The report that followed was so loud that Pierre felt certain it would attract the attention of the Germans. While the birdman was opening the tank, the boy found two cans hidden in another sheep rack.

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“These they quickly filled, then dipped the pail in and filled that, after which they hurried from the sheep shed, the aviator now leading the way, for Pierre did not know where the airplane had landed.

“ ‘This is a great find, and I thank you, my dear little Frenchman,’ said the flier. ‘You have saved the machine as well as its pilot. I hope you will not get into any trouble over this.’

“ ‘If he does, Pierre will throw pepper in the eyes of the Boches,’ returned the lad resolutely. ‘If you are afraid for him, why do you not take Pierre with you and put him in the army?’

“ ‘Not at your age, *mon enfant*. That would be impossible. You are serving your country better at home than you could in the army, and you are doing your full duty. If all at home did as well this war would be the quicker won. There, beyond that growth of trees, is where we shall find the machine.’

“The pair approached the place with the

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utmost caution. Pierre could see the airplane faintly outlined, and his pulses throbbed at thought of the glory of being able to fly above the clouds in it. How he wished it some day might be his privilege to do so.

“‘All clear,’ announced the aviator, after completing a circuit of the place on one side.

“‘All clear,’ added Pierre, who had beat up the bushes on the other side.

“The aviator climbed up to the tank, first placing a can of gasoline in the fuselage or car, whence Pierre helped him to lift it up. The boy was standing up in the car on the pilot’s seat, while the pilot was pouring the oil into the tank. The can emptied, the pilot got down and brought up the second can of oil. He had just finished this and Pierre was waiting while the aviator stepped down to bring up the pail, when a shot off toward the village caused them to stop and listen.

“Another shot, followed by a volley near

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at hand, and the whistle of bullets over their heads, stirred the birdman into instant action.

“‘The Boches!’ he cried. ‘Quick! Jump over into the back seat. You must go with me. I can’t leave you here.’

“Springing to the propeller the pilot forced it backwards a few inches and then spun it the other way. The motors started with a bang and the machine moved slowly ahead. It had gone but a few feet when the pilot leaped in.

“‘Hold on tightly,’ he shouted back. ‘Can’t stop to strap you in.’

“‘Yes, I will,’ Pierre shouted back, but his voice was lost in the roar of the motors, as the airplane shot ahead. The ground was rough and the machine careened until the lad thought it surely must tip over, then the roughness suddenly ceased and the plane was floating above ground as lightly as a feather floats in the still summer air.

“Such a thrill as Pierre felt, he had never known before. He did not heed the bullets

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from the German rifles that were being fired at them, all, fortunately, going wide of the mark and finally ceasing altogether as the airplane, twisting and turning, left them far to the rear. They were off, climbing higher and higher with the moments, until there was no earth to be seen, save as here and there a point of light suddenly appeared and almost as quickly disappeared in the black void below. They flew on and on, the boy shivering, for the air was very chill up where they were. Finally a combination of colored lights grew out of the darkness ahead of and below them, and the pilot headed for those lights. After a little he shut off his motors and pointed the nose of the plane sharply downward. Pierre gripped both sides of the fuselage and braced his feet. He was a little dizzy, but the sensation was glorious.

“Down and down they went, dropping at a terrific speed. Then suddenly the machine was brought to an even keel, the power was put on, and a few seconds later the

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wheels touched the ground, sending a jolt through the airplane that bounced the lad on his seat. The airplane soon came to a slow stop and the aviator turned to see how it fared with his passenger.

“ ‘Well?’ he questioned.

“ ‘Please do it again,’ answered the red-headed boy.

“ ‘I think you have had quite enough for one night. I must now go and report to my chief. You may come with me.’

“ ‘At last Pierre is with the army,’ chuckled the lad.

“To his commanding officer the pilot told the story of how the brave Pierre had assisted him and made it possible to save the pilot and machine from the Germans. Pierre was praised by the commanding officer, and later made much of by the fliers, whose mess he attended next morning. He determined then and there to be a flier, and during the rest of the time that he remained with the army he stayed with the flying corps. It was a month later, when the

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French took the village where he lived, that he was returned to his home, where his exploits already were known, for French aviators had dropped messages there to let his people know what he had done and where he was.

“The lad was thanked and commended by the French government for his patriotic services, which made him a proud and happy boy. Little Pierre still has hopes of flying above the clouds again, not as a passenger, but as a pilot, flying for his country.”

CHAPTER IX

THE LITTLE RUNNER OF VERDUN

“I SHALL tell you to-day of the despatch bearer and how he works. These are among the bravest of the men who fight with the armies of the Allies,” said Bomber Haynes on another occasion.

“These men, as perhaps you know, carry messages to and fro during battle before the telephone lines are laid, and in many instances after the telephone wires are shot to pieces after having been laid. Some despatch bearers travel by motor cycle while others run on foot, usually in pairs, so that, if one is killed or wounded, the other may take up his work and go on with the message. Sounds cheerful, doesn’t it?

“It is about one of these brave runners that I shall tell you a story to-day. In this

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instance the runner was a boy—that is, he eventually became a runner or despatch bearer. Raoul was his name.

“Through the town in which Raoul lived, soldiers were passing day and night toward Verdun, where some of the fiercest battles of the war were being fought. And day and night, with infrequent periods of sleep, the little fellow was out on the street to give what aid and comfort he could to the poilus of his beloved France. He took water to them, he carried their packs, he gathered food from the villagers and distributed it among those who were lagging from weariness, and all such things. Raoul even enlisted in his services a dozen other boys, whom he formed into a company that operated under his orders.

“One day he turned over the command of his company of twelve to another boy of the village, and trailed out after dark behind a regiment of French soldiers. His presence as a stranger was not discovered until the next morning, and then Raoul had a bad few

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minutes with the commander of the company to which he had attached himself. Fortunately for him one of the under-officers of that same company chanced to belong to the village where the boy lived, and vouched for him, at the same time telling the captain in command about the services little Raoul had rendered to the men passing through the village.

“ ‘What would you do here? You are too young to fight, too young to join the army in any capacity.’

“ ‘My Captain, as I served the poilus at home so I can do at the front, only to better purpose. Give me a chance, let me stay with you for a week, and if by that time Raoul has not proved his worth, send him home. Please. I have neither father nor mother.’

“ ‘Lieutenant Noyon, will you be responsible for this boy, if you think he can be useful to us?’

“ ‘It will be a pleasure to do so. I know his worth, Captain.’

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“That settled it so far as Raoul’s connection with the regiment was concerned. He began at once, under the direction of his friend the lieutenant, carrying messages, which familiarized him with the faces and names of all the officers and many of the men. One of the men of the motor cycle corps, taking an interest in the keen-witted little fellow, taught him to ride a motor cycle, which the lad picked up in a few hours so that he could handle the machine almost as well as the officer himself. At intervals he perfected himself in this, and one day was permitted to use a machine to carry a message to a point about ten miles to the rear of the regiment.

“Few of the officers knew of this new accomplishment of little Raoul, for he was always on foot when he carried messages for them. It was less than a week after he had joined the regiment that his organization went into battle. The boy was supposed to remain behind in the base camp of the regiment, but such a course did not appeal to

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Raoul, so he went along with his fellows, keeping as much out of sight as possible.

“Many thousands were engaged in that battle, for it was one of the big battles of the war. All day it waged, men were falling on all sides, and such scenes as little Raoul witnessed that day were enough to make the stoutest hearts grow faint. He did his part, not in fighting, but in helping those who did fight, helping the wounded back, assisting in giving first aid to soldiers who were too seriously wounded to be led back to dressing stations, and in carrying messages and orders, all in apparent utter disregard of his own peril. As it was, Raoul had many narrow escapes, as his bullet-shredded clothing gave mute evidence.

“On one of his trips to the rear he was obliged to remain away for nearly two hours, and when he returned he was unable to find his regiment. No one seemed able to tell him where they had gone, though he learned that they had last been seen charging to the northeast toward a wood, where

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they had been sent to rout out several nests of machine gunners.

“‘I must find them,’ muttered the lad. ‘Some of our brave fellows may need the assistance of little Raoul.’

“Taking a roundabout course, he went on his way until he came to a place where he saw that the enemy had surrounded a force that was firing from shell holes and hastily-dug trenches. He could not see the men in the shell holes, but he could see the men who were firing at them, and they were Germans.

“‘My brave fellows are surrounded,’ he groaned, ‘and the enemy is in force. I must get to them.’ He secreted himself in a nearby shell hole, watching the fight from some distance away, waiting for night, knowing that he could not hope to get through by daylight.

“The hours dragged, but little Raoul, with the patience of an Indian, lay watching and waiting. He already had picked out the spot through which he proposed to go when darkness had settled down.

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“Night came, and, as soon as the darkness was deep enough, he emerged from the shell hole and ran forward in a crouching position until he was near the enemy line, which he was able to locate by the flashes of their guns. The men of his company were shooting very slowly, he discovered, but the reason for this he did not know, unless they were trying to make every bullet find a Hun mark.

“Now extreme caution was necessary, and the boy, flat on his stomach, was wriggling along a foot at a time, and sometimes less. The journey was long, for he had to go some distance further than a straight course would have carried him, in order to avoid the danger spots in the German line. All this time he was under fire, but, though the bullets were snipping up the dirt all about him, he remained untouched.

“Raoul passed the Germans safely and was headed directly for the men of his own organization. He was now under fire from both sides, which made his peril great, and

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he still had to crawl much further before he could come within hailing distance of his own men.

“It was about this time that keen eyes made out the crawling, creeping figure approaching the French force, and a machine gun was promptly turned on him, the bullets striking just in front of him, filling his eyes and mouth with dirt.

“‘Don’t shoot,’ he called. ‘I am a Frenchman.’

“The fire was quickly elevated and then Raoul raised himself on all fours and ran with all speed, never stopping until he toppled head over heels into a shell hole.

“The lad fell into rough hands, for many still believed this was a German trick of some sort.

“‘Who are you?’ demanded a stern voice.

“‘Raoul, the runner,’ he gasped. ‘Let go of my throat.’

“‘Who—wha—at? Raoul?’ exclaimed a familiar voice, which the boy instantly recognized as belonging to Lieutenant Noyon.

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“ ‘Yes, my Lieutenant. It is I.’

“ ‘Boy, how did you get here?’

“ ‘I crawled most of the way. Well did I know that my officer would need something that Raoul could get for him.’

“ ‘We do indeed need something, or shall before many hours, but it is nothing that you can get for us. Tell me, how is the battle going?’

“ ‘Very warm. What is it you are in need of, my Lieutenant?’

“ ‘Ammunition. Unless we get some or can get help we shall not be able to hold out beyond midday to-morrow.’

“ ‘Is all your company here, sir?’

“ ‘Here and in adjoining shell holes, what is left of them. More than half of my brave fellows are dead.’

“ ‘How has it fared with the rest of the regiment?’

“ ‘I think they got away. G Company was sent up here to drive out a nest of machine gunners, but we were cut off, as I feared we might be, and here we are. You

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heard nothing about sending us relief, did you?’

“ ‘No, my Lieutenant. I do not think they have missed you, and they probably will not so long as the battle is raging so furiously.’

“While talking, Raoul had been thinking hard, and he already had a plan in mind.

“ ‘My Officer,’ he said, ‘Raoul will go back and carry the tidings of your plight to the commander.’

“ ‘No, no, no,’ cried the lieutenant. ‘It will be sure death. I cannot permit it.’

“ ‘Is it not better that a boy should offer his life than that half a company of French soldiers should be sacrificed?’ he insisted.

“ ‘That is not the point. The conditions make it impossible for me to assent. You are a brave lad, the bravest of the brave, but do you think my noble fellows would approve of my letting you go back to certain death?’

“ ‘It is not for them to say. It is for you, my Lieutenant. It is certain death for you to remain here and fight it out, if you are

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short of ammunition. What kind of ammunition are you most in need of?"

"For the machine guns. We shall be short for the rifles too, but, had we sufficient for the machine guns, we might be able to hold the Boches off for another day, and perhaps longer. My men will need food, but we can do without that. Ammunition is what we must have."

"'And ammunition you shall have,' murmured the brave lad, but in too low a voice for the lieutenant to hear.

"'You will now lie down close up against the front of the shell hole where you will be safe, and get some rest. We shall go on fighting. I wish you had not come here. It was wrong of you, Raoul.'

"'It was my place to be here with my beloved poilus,' answered the boy stoutly. 'You have not yet told me to go back.'

"'Nor shall I. I forbid it.'

"Raoul crawled over to the front side of the shell hole, and came back a few moments later to tell Lieutenant Noyon something

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about the position of the German machine guns, thereby enabling that officer to direct his fire to better advantage. After a time the men in the shell hole forgot all about little Raoul, who lay huddled up, apparently fast asleep.

“‘Call the child here,’ commanded the lieutenant finally. ‘He may be able to give some further information about those fellows over there.’

“The soldier who had received the order reported a moment later that the little fellow was not in the shell hole and that none of the men knew where he was.

“The lieutenant groaned.

“‘He has disobeyed my orders and started back to get help for us. Let it be an inspiration to us to fight on to the death.’

“A cheer answered the plea of the leader of the little band. In the meantime little Raoul, who, unobserved, had crawled from the shell hole, was creeping over the ground on his perilous journey for his brave poilus who had determined to make their last

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stand. Having lost the location of the place through which he had passed the Hun lines, he now took a more northerly course in an effort to avoid them altogether.

“Suddenly a heavy body hurled itself upon him and crushed the little lad to the ground. Something hit him on the head at the same time and a darkness, deeper than that of the night, overwhelmed him. Raoul had been discovered by a prowling scout out in No Man’s Land and captured with an ease that he would not have believed possible.

“The German, observing that his captive was limp and apparently lifeless, and observing, at the same time, that it was a boy, decided that it was his duty to take the captive, dead or alive, back to his commanding officer, as it was unusual to capture an enemy boy. The captain would be glad to learn that the French were using boys in their army, which would show that their man-power was running low. So he swung the little fellow over his shoulder and started back. Raoul was as limp as a bag

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of meal, but was not much of a burden for the muscular German to carry.

“The captor strode along toward the dug-out where he knew he would find his commanding officer. He sent in word that he wished to report to his captain with a prisoner, a boy whom he had captured out between the lines. While waiting for permission to enter, the Hun threw the little fellow down on the ground, hunched his shoulders and adjusted his equipment so that he might enter the presence of his officer in a condition that might not call for a rebuke.

“A messenger appeared later, bidding the scout to enter.

“The Hun turned and stooped over with outstretched hands to gather up his little captive, but his hands touched only the torn-up earth. He groped frantically, but without finding that which he sought. Raoul was not there. He had disappeared as utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed him down. The German was frantic. He began to fire his rifle at shadows, and

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continued to do so until a sergeant stopped him and dragged him before the captain, where he passed a few bad minutes.

“While all this was going on, out there on the field back of the German position, a few hundred yards away, lay little Raoul, holding both hands to his dizzy head, struggling with all his might to collect himself that he might go on with his mission.

“The jolting he got upon being thrown to the ground at the entrance to the dugout had brought the lad back to consciousness. The instant the scout’s back was turned he summoned all his strength and rolled away a few paces, then, getting on all fours, he went hopping away until he collapsed on the ground, face down. There were tears in his eyes, but not a moan escaped the plucky boy.

“ ‘Raoul fooled the stupid Boche!’ he muttered.

“A few moments showed him that there was no pursuit at hand, so he pulled himself together and ran along on all fours again. He continued in this manner until he

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plunged head first into a shell hole, which served to shake him up and put new life into him. Raoul scrambled out and started away toward his own lines at a trot, with every faculty on the alert for Boches. He knew there were plenty of them about, so he moved rapidly but with caution. Haste was necessary if he would save the brave fellows of G Company.

“He continued on until daylight; then he made a disheartening discovery. He was now between the battle lines and the battle was raging furiously.

“He ran now, bending low, while sharpshooters on the German line tried their best to tumble him over. A bullet caught the boy in one shoulder and spun him around. Raoul fell on his face but was up in a flash, and, shaking an angry fist in the direction of the German lines, ran on toward the goal that was now plainly in sight.

“The French, like the Germans, had dug themselves in and the artillery on both sides was blazing away. Big shells and small

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shells were falling in No Man's Land and exploding with tremendous crashes. The air seemed full of dirt and rubbish that these explosions threw up, some of them half burying the plucky little lad, but Raoul, in each instance, dug himself out and took up his run again with a pluck that knew no weakening.

"The wound in the boy's shoulder was bleeding profusely, but he did not realize that he had been wounded, so bent was his mind on the task of saving the beloved poilus of G Company, out there battling for their lives.

" 'But I will fool them ; it is not for Raoul to die yet, with his work only just begun.'

"The fire, apparently directed at him, was getting pretty hot, even for a little soldier who was so little afraid of it as was Raoul. He crouched lower as he ran, making signals to his own lines when he was near enough to do so, to indicate that it was a friend who was hurrying toward them. There were a few in the French lines who saw and knew

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the slender, boyish figure. On their part they expected every second to see him riddled with shrapnel or machine-gun bullets. Several bullets scratched his flesh when he was almost at the edge of the shallow trench, and as he went over the parapet, a piece of shrapnel raked his skull and sent him sprawling into the trench.

“For a few moments Raoul lay stunned, then struggled to his feet.

“‘The colonel, quick!’ he urged.

“‘What is this?’ demanded the officer whom Raoul sought. The colonel was up among his men, encouraging, directing, and stiffening their courage with his presence. He knew Raoul and therefore was ready to listen to what the lad had to say.

“‘My colonel, G Company is cut off. They have been fighting all night, and when I left more than half their men were down.’

“‘All Frenchmen must fight to-day,’ answered the colonel. ‘Look how these brave fellows are doing their duty.’

“‘Yes, my Colonel, but the men of G Com-

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pany are short of ammunition. By midday they will be firing their last shots and then—you know the rest, my Colonel. Oh, please, please send them the things to fight with.'

" 'Where, where?' demanded the commanding officer, now thoroughly aroused to the need for quick action. 'Where are they?'

" 'Some kilometers to the northwest, bearing on a small forest that comes out into the open like a wedge.'

" 'I know the location. So that is where they are? Have they dug in?'

" 'In some places. In others they are in shell craters and fighting, oh, so gloriously, my Colonel.'

"The officer called an orderly and gave him a few terse directions.

" 'Can you not send a flying bomber to entertain the Boches while our men are on the way?' urged Raoul.

" 'The idea is excellent, but our machines are otherwise engaged.'

Raoul groaned.

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“ ‘It will take hours to reach them and by that time all that will be left of G Company will be a heap of dead. My Colonel, may I make a suggestion?’

“ ‘Certainly.’

“ ‘Send a corps of motor cycles with side cars carrying machine guns, and let them entertain the Boches until the infantry can get there. I will lead them and show the way, my Colonel.’

“ ‘My son, no motor cycles could cross the field here. They would be shelled out of existence before they had covered half the distance. How would you proceed in those circumstances?’

“ ‘My Colonel, I should take the Luxemburg road until near Lunaville, there I should strike east by a little north until I came to the crossroads that are there. From that point, screened by some fields of young trees, I should drive down, unseen by the Boches who are attacking G Company, and take them on their flank with an enfilading fire.’

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“The colonel frowned, then laughed.

“‘You are a remarkable child. May I ask how you chance to know about Luxemburg, Lunaville, the crossroads and the forest of small trees?’

“‘My Colonel, I have studied the maps of the officers, and I have been over part of the ground.’

“‘So? Did you go out with G Company?’

“‘No, my Colonel. I went out in search of them and went through the German lines in the dark of night. Lieutenant Noyon forbade my trying to come back here, fearing that I might be killed. I ran away while he was not looking. I beg of you, my Colonel, to send him aid by the motor cycles and permit me to lead them.’

“To Raoul’s surprise, the colonel drew the lad to him and kissed him on both cheeks, much to the little fellow’s embarrassment.

“‘My noble boy!’ he exclaimed. ‘One day you will be an officer—if you live that long,’ he added, his face wrinkling into a smile. ‘You are wounded, you must have your

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wounds dressed. In the meantime I will act upon your advice and send a motor corps with machine guns.'

" 'Please, please, my Colonel, let me go with them to show the way. Think what will happen should the men lose their way. They have ammunition enough only to last until noon. Haste, haste, my Colonel!'

" 'Yes, you shall go. Such devotion to country demands the gratifying of any wish you may make. Still, you do not know how to operate a motor cycle, and the man who occupies the side car must handle the machine gun.'

" 'Ah, my Colonel, I can drive, I have driven. I can drive almost as skilfully as the best man in the corps, and I can fight, too.'

" 'Is there anything that you cannot do well?' wondered the colonel.

" 'Many things, my Colonel. I cannot command an army.'

" 'You will do that some day, no fear about that,' answered the colonel, laughingly.

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‘Lieutenant Claudon will be in command, and you shall guide the squadron until within range and then you will fall to the rear and keep out of the fight, or at least keep as far away as your zeal will permit you to do. In no circumstances must you handle a gun or fight. The French do not permit their children to bear arms against an enemy. You understand, my son, this is a command from your superior officer.’

“Raoul saluted and was off in a series of leaps and bounds that soon carried him out of sight of the colonel.

“Raoul was soon at the station of the motor cycle corps, where he found Lieutenant Claudon feverishly preparing for the dash to the rescue of what was left of G Company. The boy saluted and reported for duty, and was informed by the lieutenant that he was to guide the party to the scene, having received such orders from the colonel.

“‘You will proceed at a fast pace, displaying a courier’s flag, which will give you right of way.’

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“ ‘Thank you, sir. May I ask if you have ammunition for G Company?’

“ ‘For them and for us. I have assigned a good man to ride with you, and he will handle the machine gun if necessary. You are to follow his directions regarding your maneuvers, and you are to act solely as guide. Do you understand?’

“ ‘Your orders shall be obeyed,’ was the brief answer of the little soldier.

“The members of the motor cycle corps were in the habit of riding after fast pace-makers, but they followed a man that day who was in a hurry—a little man who cared not for danger, whose whole soul and energy were bent on reaching his companions who were battling for their lives.

“The motor cycles went off with a roar, first Raoul and his gunner, followed closely by the lieutenant and the men.

“ ‘Can you stand being shaken up?’ questioned Raoul, leaning over to the soldier in the side car.

“ ‘All you can give me,’ answered the sol-



ROUL'S COMPANION OPENED UP

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dier. 'Do not get too far ahead of the lieutenant just yet. Wait until we near the place, then we will show him a clean pair of heels.' The man accompanied his words with a wink which Raoul understood and appreciated.

"'I wish we had a clear road. I'd show them a hundred kilometers or better an hour. Maybe Raoul will get the chance before we have gone far, but, my poilu, if the side car ever gets separated you will land over in the North Sea or maybe all the way over in England.'

"It was the soldier's opportunity to grin.

"Behind them trailed fifty cars, each with a side car and a machine gun, in addition to which each driver, with the exception of Raoul, carried a rifle strapped over his back.

"The road was full of traffic, heavy trucks, motor cars, artillery, supply wagons, troops moving back and forth, and confusion reigned from one end of the great highway to the other. Besides this, shells were falling on both sides of the road, here and there

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landing on the road and tearing great gaps in it. Little Raoul fairly dove through the explosion of one of those shells, with shrapnel, dirt and stones falling all about him. The cars following were held up for a moment until the shower caused by the explosion had fallen.

“Eventually they left the broad road and struck off on another highway that was in worse condition than the one they had just left. This, however, did not cause Raoul to lessen his speed. If anything, he increased it, and they soon came to the crossroads of which he had spoken to his colonel. From that point on the way lay over fields, shell-torn and full of small obstructions, any one of which, if struck by a rapidly moving car, would hurl the vehicle into the air. In fact the car driven by Raoul was in the air a good part of the time—that is, its wheels were off the ground and the soldier in the side car was clinging to the sides of it to keep from being thrown out.

“Reaching the small forest of young trees,

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the lieutenant signalled his orders to the following cars, intending to overhaul Raoul and give him directions before they arrived at the scene of operations, which they reached almost ere the lieutenant realized it, for the lad had covered the ground with incredible speed.

“ ‘There, nearest to the wedge of wood, are our brave fellows,’ he told the soldier in the side car. ‘Orders, my poilu? Shall we dash down and give the Boches the first dose?’

“ ‘Yes, until the lieutenant gives us further orders. The Boche line does not appear to be a very long one.’

“ ‘No, they are bunched, but there are plenty of them there, as you will find when they discover us. There they go!’

“The Germans had turned a machine gun on the leading motor cycle. Raoul’s companion swung his own weapon toward the enemy and opened up. Raoul approached the Hun line on an oblique course while his companion pumped lead at the Germans.

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To the rear of these two the familiar rat-tat-tat of machine-gun fire began. Now the lieutenant, putting on a burst of speed, took the lead, and the whole line of swiftly moving motor cycles swept the German trenches. Nearly all the fire of the Germans was now directed at the motor cycles, the men of G Company firing only scatteringly and at long intervals. Raoul understood the reason for this—their ammunition was exhausted, or practically so, and all that was left them was to wait for the rescue now at hand.

“The attack of the motor cycle corps was furious and fast. That was the way this corps did things, but not a machine was handled more skilfully, more rapidly, than the one driven by little Raoul. They raked the Hun trenches with a killing fire. Back and forth went the cycles, swinging out over the field in wide curves and back again to sting, darting in and out, making it difficult for the Huns to get in telling shots.

“A little of this went a long way with the

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cowardly Boches, and in a short time they bolted from their trenches and started running for the woods. But they had not reckoned on the mood of the men of G Company, who sprang from their shell holes and charged at the enemy with bayonets fixed. Here the machine guns on the motor cycles again got in their deadly work. A few minutes of this double attack was quite sufficient for the Germans, and they threw down their arms, raising their hands above their heads and surrendered to the little remnant of G Company.

“Motor cycles were quickly on the ground, their guns trained on the Germans, ready to resume firing in case of treachery, for which the Huns are noted.

“Lieutenant Noyon, wounded, pale and exhausted, staggered to the car driven by little Raoul and, throwing his arms about the little fellow’s neck, kissed him almost reverently.

“‘It is to you, my noble Raoul, that we owe our lives.’

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“‘It is to you, my Lieutenant, that Raoul owes the great privilege of serving his country,’ answered the lad in a tone of grateful appreciation.

“At the direction of the lieutenant in command of the motor corps, the wounded men of G Company were taken into the side cars, the soldiers who had come to the rescue stepping out to assist the able men of G Company in herding the prisoners and driving them back to the French lines. The prisoners were compelled to carry the machine guns that they had been operating, followed by half a dozen motor cycles, whose machine guns were kept trained on them all the way.

“It was night before the prisoners and their escorts arrived at the French lines, where the story of little Raoul’s brave acts had preceded them, for Raoul had remained back with the prisoners. He wished to have the privilege of escorting them in, looking upon them, as he did, as his own prisoners. This privilege was readily given to him.

“That night little Raoul stood before his

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colonel, a proud, happy boy. His pride and satisfaction shone in his eyes, his position being at attention as he listened to the brief words of praise from his commanding officer.

“ ‘Raoul,’ said the colonel, ‘it is such soldiers as you that France depends upon now and for the future. Despite your lack of years I have decided that you shall wear the uniform of your country’s army. Further than that, I name you a corporal. While I cannot permit you to fight, you will continue to act as a despatch bearer and be connected with the headquarters staff.

“ ‘Raoul, worthy son of France, I salute you.’ The colonel raised a hand to the visor of his cap, and Raoul brought his own right hand up in a snappy salute.

“It was at this point that the entire regiment, that had been a witness to the brief ceremony, broke out into cheers that carried to the German lines far over on the other side of the shell-torn field.

“Little Raoul served his country nobly,

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and by this time undoubtedly has another stripe on his sleeve. That, my young friends, is but a leaf torn from the life of one Little Boy Hero of France," concluded Bomber Haynes.

CHAPTER X

PHILIPPE, THE ARGONNE HERO

THE fall was well nigh spent and the days out of doors for the boys, who had become so interested in Bomber Haynes' stories, were few.

"I happen to know of my own knowledge about the story I shall tell you to-day," said Sergeant Bomber Haynes late one afternoon after the boys had had a particularly strenuous drill and potato battle. "This little fellow's name was Philippe, fourteen years old, slender and wiry, a boy who had lived among the great trees most of his young life,

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who knew the birds and the small animals as few men know them.

“Philippe’s home was at the edge of the great Argonne Forest, where our countrymen and the French fought so desperately, but the war had driven the boy and his parents from home. His father was a soldier and his mother was living with an aunt in a little village some distance back of the French lines, where Philippe had been staying up to the time the incidents I am about to relate occurred. Philippe, weary of the village and eager to serve his country, induced his mother to let him go out with a company of village territorials who were that night marching to the front. He was confident he could be of service to them.

“That night the French territorials marched until nearly daybreak, Philippe trudging along and keeping up with their steady swing, now and then running to make up for distance lost through their taking longer steps than he was able to take, for his legs were not so long as theirs. Philippe

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had to keep pretty much in the background lest an officer discover and send him back home, which was not at all according to the little fellow's plans.

"All of that day they marched, and just after dark that same night made camp with a part of the army that was facing the great forest. Shells were bursting at intervals, behind, in and on all sides of the French lines, but no one appeared to pay much attention to them.

"That night he thought things over and decided upon the manner in which he could best serve his country. He had heard two officers talking of the plans of that particular part of the army, to which he listened, unobserved, until he was in possession of their general plan of campaign. This plan was no secret, though the details of how it was to be carried out, and when, were secrets that none except the General Staff knew about. Artillery was even then shelling the Argonne Forest, where Germans were supposed to be, and French airships had been

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flying over the tops of the tall trees, their observers peering down to find out what was going on within the enemy lines. They did not find out much, for the forest of Argonne is very dense, but not so dense now as it was before the two armies fought for it. Fellows, there is a lot of all right good timber lying on the ground in that forest now; timber that was not felled with the woodman's axe, either.

"On the morning following Philippe's arrival he presented himself to the colonel of the regiment to which his friends, the territorials, belonged.

" 'My Colonel,' he said, 'I am Philippe of the territorials, with whom I came here. I wish to offer my services to the army—I wish to join the army.'

"The colonel surveyed the slender lad with a smile.

" 'What can you do?' he questioned.

" 'I can guide the soldiers, my Colonel. Philippe knows many ways and by-ways in the forest that the soldier knows not of, and

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can tell the poilus many things that will be of great value to them.'

" 'What is this you say about the forest?' demanded the colonel. 'What forest?'

" 'The great forest—the Argonne Forest.'

" 'What do you know of it?'

" 'Many things. I have lived in it and near it all my life. I can climb trees, too, and do many things that the poilus cannot.'

" 'Did you ever see a military map?' asked the colonel.

"Philippe shook his head. The colonel spread a map before him and placed his finger on a double line that extended for some distance.

" 'Do you know what this is?'

" 'No, my Colonel, but Philippe knows where it is,' replied the lad after studying the double lines for a moment. 'It is the Serpents' Gulley, where many things hide from the light of day, and where one day our brave poilus may try to hide and where Fritz will slaughter them.'

"Colonel Lafond grew instantly inter-

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ested. It was a ravine that he had pointed out, and the boy, without understanding the meaning of the lines, had identified the spot and knew what it was. The colonel drew up a camp stool and bade the little fellow sit down beside him. Together they went over the map with great care, the officer asking questions, Philippe answering them, pointing out, here and there, corrections that should be made, and giving the colonel information that opened up possibilities that had not before occurred to him. The colonel sent for an orderly and told him that he wished a man, who was not afraid to go through a barrage, to carry a message to a captain in command of the unit nearest to the forest.

“ ‘My Colonel, let Philippe go.’

“ ‘It is a perilous journey, my son.’

“ ‘No more so for me than for another. Besides, I can more easily be spared than can a soldier. Show me on the map, please, where the message is to be delivered?’

“The colonel placed a finger at a point

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where the forest seemed to reach out beyond the line of the higher trees. 'This is the point,' he said.

" 'Very good, my Colonel, I know the way. I will take the message.'

"The officer smiled at the boy's eagerness, and, after a brief reflection, wrote a code message to the captain in command of the position. The information conveyed to the captain was based on something that Philippe had told the colonel about the lay of the land over there, and, after some brief directions, the little fellow was permitted to go on this his first mission for his country.

"Philippe had been provided with a pass to show in case he was held up on the way, but the only things that detained him were exploding shells and rifle fire. He was discovered by snipers almost the moment he appeared out on the field, and these did their best to put an end to him, but the boy was wary and skilful in wriggling to the right or to the left to change his course, which bothered the snipers. Here and there a

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trench was used by him to cover his progress, then a stretch of grass, and so on until he was within a few hundred yards of his destination.

“The little Frenchman’s advance was watched from his own lines with strained interest, for the watchers did not believe he would be able to make his objective, but he did, and to the amazement of those in that advanced trench he tumbled into it amid little geysers of dirt that spurted up about him from the bullets of machine guns that were seeking him out.

“‘How did you get here?’ demanded the captain in command at that point, when Philippe had been brought to his dugout.

“‘Like a baby, I crept, and like a baby I shall make my way back, if I have to go back.’

“‘Colonel Lafond says you know this forest well,’ said the officer.

“‘Yes, my Captain.’

“‘Do you think you can get some information for me without losing your own life

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and getting us into trouble at the same time?"

" 'Yes, my Captain.'

" 'What I wish you to find out is where the road from the east is located, over which the Germans are hauling their batteries into the forest. I don't know how you are going to get this information, for three men have failed in the attempt already. They have not come back, my son,' he added gravely.

"Philippe pointed to the map of the locality that lay before the officer.

" 'Here are the roads that lead into the forest from the eastward. The upper and lower ones are but trails that the hunters take. This one is the main road, and the only one over which heavy guns could be drawn,' Philippe informed him.

" 'Our information is that it is the lower one, my son.'

" 'Your information is not correct, my Captain. It is the middle one. Your airmen should have told you that, unless the Boches have covered the road so that it can-

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not be seen. It is there, and you can order artillery to fire upon it with the certainty that you are going to hit a Boche. Philippe will look further for you to-night.'

"The officer nodded thoughtfully, not giving particular heed to the lad's assertion that he would look further that night. It was Philippe's purpose to go into the forest, but had the captain understood the boy's plan, to go deep into the forest, right into the German lines, he would have forbidden it. Men who had tried it never came back, hence what could a boy expect to accomplish?

"All the rest of the day Philippe devoted to watching the forest, observing the firing, consulting the map, now and then turning his impish face up to answer a question, or to reply to some teasing remark of a poilu. He was a queer boy, a child of nature, and, like all who have lived close to nature, Philippe was reticent to a point of bashfulness in all things but the war and his beloved France. From certain indications that came from observation of the forest be-

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fore them, the little French boy was able to make his plans for the night, but these he confided to no one because he feared he would not be permitted to carry out the plans he had laid for himself.

“With night the firing died down, but the artillery back of the French lines and the German big guns in the forest began to send out wave after wave of rolling thunder. Under cover of the noise and the darkness, and with a chunk of black bread in his pocket, little Philippe slipped over the parapet and skulked away from his own lines unobserved, even by his own sentries. For a time he crept along parallel with the outer edge of the forest, then, turning, went straight in, every few moments flattening himself, with an ear to the ground to listen. He was soon lost in the depths of the forest.

“A serpent wriggling over the ground would rustle the grass and leaves underneath him more than did little Philippe. His progress was as near noiseless as it was possible to be.

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“Philippe had not penetrated very far into the forest before he found what he was looking for—Boches. That is, he heard their voices. As he expected would be the case, he discovered a machine-gun nest, and then set to work to find other machine-gun units and fix their positions in his mind. Now and then a pocket flashlight, in the hands of a German, revealed the positions of men stationed in shallow pits, these latter being covered with green boughs, and in some cases with small trees that had been cut down and laid over the machine-gun positions.

“‘Nests of death,’ muttered the boy.

“His every step was a step of peril, and he knew that at any moment he might find himself in the grip of a prowling German, though Philippe believed that the Boches, secure in the thought that they were safe from discovery, would not be so very alert, and in this he was right. He met with no interference and roamed almost at will the entire length of the position until he had

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nearly every detail of it firmly fixed in his mind.

“It was late in the night when he returned to the machine-gun nest first discovered, having found that quite a distance lay between it and the nearest one to the south, which, he told himself, was very bad judgment on the part of the Germans. Getting out of the forest was easier than entering it, for he now knew where to be on the lookout for sentries, and managed to get away without a slip or sound that might reveal his presence.

“Reaching the open he flattened himself on the ground and crawled along a foot or so at a time, for great things now depended upon his movements.

“At last the trench of the French first line loomed faintly before him, and, though he did not know it, keen eyes had been observing the little figure creeping along the ground, and a dozen rifles were trained on it.

“A sentry challenged in a low voice.

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“‘Philippe,’ answered the boy. ‘I must see your commanding officer at once.’”

“A hand reached out and dragged the little fellow into the trench, whence he was conducted to the dugout occupied by the officer in command, to whom he briefly related all that he had discovered.

“‘Well done,’ exclaimed the officer after listening with interest to what Philippe had to say. ‘Put down on the map here, as nearly as you can, the location of the nest you say is an isolated one.’ This Philippe did, making a circle with a pencil to indicate the machine-gun pits, and dots to show where the sentries might be looked for.

“‘Now, my son, what would you suggest as the best way to take this whole outfit?’ asked the captain smilingly.

“Philippe was prompt in his reply and rather amazed the officer by his suggestions.

“‘One company of our poilus should be able to do it,’ said the boy. ‘First, six good scouts should go out armed with revolvers and heavy clubs, if you have such things. I

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can show them where to find the sentries. With their clubs they can put the sentries to sleep, and the rest will be easy. While the scouts are doing this the company should go to the north and come down to the point I have marked on the map, along the edge of the forest. There is nothing north of that place that will interfere. When the company reaches that point I can show them the way in.'

" 'My boy, one day you will be a general,' cried the captain enthusiastically.

" 'Philippe fears the war will not last long enough for that. He at least hopes it may not. Let's go!'

" 'Patience, my son. I must first obtain permission from my colonel, and wait until we are relieved. That will take but a short time. Lie down on the blankets over there and rest. You have earned it.'

" 'Thank you, I will. I have still much work to do before daylight.'

"Philippe curled up on the blankets, and, with an arm thrown over his head to shut

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out the flickering light of the captain's candle, went to sleep. He did not awaken until he felt the touch of the officer's hand on his head, whereupon the little fellow was on his feet in an instant.

“ ‘Is it the zero hour, my Captain?’

“ ‘Yes. All is ready, and the company is on its way to the rendezvous suggested by you. You will accompany me and the six men, taking the more direct route. The colonel has warmly complimented you for your zeal and cleverness, and, while he does not believe we can accomplish all that you hope for, he says the chance of reward is worth the effort.’

“ ‘We will fool the colonel,’ answered the lad soberly.

“The seven men, with the boy of the impish face, picked their way cautiously to the edge of the forest, where Philippe bade them lie down and wait for him while he once more entered the forest to make certain that there had been no change in the positions of the sentries.

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“ ‘All is well,’ he said, when, half an hour later, he suddenly appeared again.

“The captain gave the six scouts the order as suggested by Philippe and without a slip every one of the German sentries was captured, each after a sound whack on his head, being bound, and later carried to the edge of the forest, while the little Frenchman was once more making his way around the machine-gun nest. He returned in time to meet his company, which, after a few instructions from their commanding officer, he led into the forest in single file.

“Slowly and cautiously, with only here and there a whispered word of direction, the company silently surrounded the machine-gun nest.

“ ‘Draw in and cover them,’ ordered the officer. ‘Pass the word along. Bombers stand by to bomb the Boches out, but not a shot is to be fired or a bomb thrown until I fire my pistol. Ready!’

“The captain thereupon called out to the Germans that the entire machine-gun nest

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was surrounded, and demanded the surrender of the outfit. He was obliged to shout to make himself heard, for the forest was resounding with crashes of exploding shells that the French artillery was firing in its search for the road over which the Germans were moving troops and supplies.

“A shot was fired from one of the emplacements, and the bullet whistled very close to the head of Philippe. The bombers, however, taking the shot as a signal, hurled their bombs, just as the first faint light of the coming dawn filtered through the trees and made the men visible to each other.

“Cries of ‘Kamerad’ were heard all along the line, and men with uplifted hands began coming from the machine-gun pits. Their hands went higher when they saw rifles pointed at them from every direction. The numbers that tumbled out amazed the French captain, who had no idea that there were so many men in the machine-gun nest, though it extended for a considerable distance along the edge of the forest.

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“The prisoners were quickly formed by twos, while a search was made in the pits for stragglers, of whom there were only about a dozen rounded up. The machine guns were then removed. Thus was accomplished a brilliant exploit without the loss of a man on either side, for not a German had been killed by the bombers, who had purposely thrown their missiles of death so they would not drop into the nests.

“The prisoners and the booty were started for the French lines on the same course taken by the French company when it marched in, and the whole outfit arrived within the French lines some time later in perfect safety.

“You may well believe that Philippe received a warm welcome when he got back. Like another boy about whom you have heard, he was permitted to join the army and serve in the intelligence department, where he distinguished himself further.

“Later developments proved that the boy had also been right about the roads in the

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forest, especially the one over which the Boches had been bringing up their supplies, which in due time was shelled by the French with great effect.

“Do you not think, fellows, that Philippe was worthy of the honor bestowed upon him?” questioned Bomber Haynes.

“‘Yes,’ shouted the boys.

“‘Little Philippe may have been little, but he was big,’ added Abe Skinner.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

IT WAS more than a week later when the boys next saw Bomber Haynes. The sergeant sent word that he would be at the schoolhouse about five o'clock in the afternoon that day and requested that all the boys be there as he had some news of importance to tell them.

They were all there, ready with a shout of welcome and a rush for the big bomber who had so endeared himself to them and who had given them so many entertaining hours. They observed, with the keen eyes of youth, that the sergeant's face was sad, though his eyes were bright and sparkling.

"Are you going to tell us a sad story to-day?" questioned Abe.

"What makes you think I am going to

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tell you a weepy story, Abe?" answered the sergeant.

"Because you look as if you wanted to cry already."

Sergeant Haynes laughed heartily.

"There will be no story to-day, Abe. No more stories from Bomber Haynes now, and perhaps never," he added with a note of sadness in his tone. "I am going away, fellows. This is the last time you will see me, for I am leaving at eight o'clock this evening."

"To—to—for Fra—" stammered Abe.

"Yes, Abe, for France. I am ordered to rejoin my regiment. My play-spell is over and I am glad except for one thing—I do not want to leave you boys. I wish I could take you all along with me and show you the real thing, show you so you might see, with your own eyes, what wonderful fellows these French boys are. That, of course, is impossible, but it is possible that before this war is ended some of you may be in it. We have not won the war yet, but we are going to. I may never come back, but I am going

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over to help put the cruel Germans where they can do no more harm to the world. If I do come back after the war, depend upon it I shall come here to see you and to greet you, at least, for you fellows won't care to hear any of my stories by then."

"Yes we will," shouted the boys.

"It is fine of you to say so. There is but one more thing to say before I bid you good-bye. Try, each and every one of you, to build up in your hearts the spirit and the love of country that make these little Frenchmen of whom I have told you stand out among the world's greatest heroes. Be willing to make any sacrifice for the greatest and noblest country of them all, be true to your country, be true to yourselves, and the rest will take care of itself. Fellows, good-bye. I'll throw a bomb for each of you, and I'll say when I throw them, 'This is for Abe; take this, you Boche! This is for Joe; take this, you Boche!' and so on. Once more, good-bye."

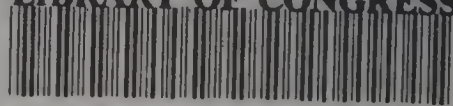
Bomber Haynes drew himself up to atten-

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tion and saluted. Every boy was on his feet, every pair of heels clicked together, and, as one, they brought their right hands to the visors of their caps and returned the salute, whereupon Sergeant Bomber Haynes turned and strode away, not trusting himself to look back at these splendid young American boys of whom he had grown so fond and whom he felt deep down in his heart he might never see again.

THE END

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